

AperTO - Archivio Istituzionale Open Access dell'Università di Torino

## Continuity and Change in Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt in the aftermath of the Arab Uprisings

### This is the author's manuscript

*Original Citation:*

*Availability:*

This version is available <http://hdl.handle.net/2318/155470> since 2016-06-08T12:15:30Z

*Publisher:*

Abingdon : Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2006-

*Terms of use:*

Open Access

Anyone can freely access the full text of works made available as "Open Access". Works made available under a Creative Commons license can be used according to the terms and conditions of said license. Use of all other works requires consent of the right holder (author or publisher) if not exempted from copyright protection by the applicable law.

(Article begins on next page)

**Special Issue: ‘Continuity and change before and after the Arab uprisings in Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt,’ edited by Paola Rivetti and Rosita Di Peri**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

- 1) *Continuity and change before and after the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco. Regime reconfiguration and policy-making in North Africa*, Paola Rivetti
- 2) *Change and Continuity after the Arab Uprising: The Consequences of State Formation in Arab North African States*, Raymond Hinnebusch
- 3) *Constitutions against Revolutions. Political Participation in North Africa*, Gianluca Parolin
- 4) *The Project of Advanced Regionalisation in Morocco: Analysis of a Lampedusian Reform*, Raquel Ojeda García and Ángela Suárez Collado
- 5) *From reform to resistance: Universities and student mobilisation in Egypt and Morocco before and after the Arab Uprisings*, Florian Kohstall
- 6) *Enduring class struggle in Tunisia: the fight for identity beyond Political Islam*, Fabio Merone
- 7) *Labour Demands, Regime Concessions: Moroccan Unions and the Arab Uprising*, Matt Buehler
- 8) *An enduring ‘touristic miracle’ in Tunisia? Coping with old challenges after the revolution*, Rosita Di Peri
- 9) *Shifting Priorities or Business as Usual? Continuity and Change in the post-2011 IMF and World Bank Engagement with Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt*, Adam Hanieh
- 10) *No democratic change... and yet no authoritarian continuity. The inter-paradigm debate and North Africa after the uprisings*, Francesco Cavatorta

# Continuity and change before and after the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco. Regime reconfiguration and policy-making in North Africa

PAOLA RIVETTI<sup>1</sup>

*ABSTRACT While the scholarship on the Arab uprisings is increasingly complex and intellectually refined, this special issue considers an aspect that so far has failed to attract sustained scholarly attention, namely continuity and change. This introduction provides the framework underpinning the special issue as a whole and discusses all the articles composing it, while elaborating on the scientific contribution that the examination of continuity and change before and after the uprisings can make to our understanding of politics in the region.*

**Keywords:** Continuity, Change, Arab uprisings, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Regime reconfiguration

The Arab Uprisings have generated significant amounts of scholarly reflections on how politics functions in the Middle East and North Africa, with scholars broadly shifting between the dynamics of either democratic change or authoritarian continuity. There is a vast literature on the causes of the uprisings and on explanations for how they occurred in some countries and not in others, but it is accepted as conventional wisdom that the politics of the region, both in the short and in the long-term, has changed for good.<sup>2</sup> This is potentially the case, but one should be aware that the complexity of earth-shattering events is considerable and that it takes time to tease out their impact.<sup>3</sup> It should be thus highlighted that in the examination of any revolutionary process there should also be an emphasis on what has not suddenly changed from one day to the next, and more attention should be paid to long-term processes of change, whose culminating moments are revolutions, instead of conceptualising revolutions as unexpected and sudden events. It is both academically and politically problematic to look at the uprisings solely relying on 'change' as the dominant perspective because we can always detect a certain amount of continuities in the political, social and economic relations of societies having witnessed massive upheavals.

This special issue presents contributions exposing the overlapping of continuity and change. More specifically, it investigates them in the context of state-building, institutional

---

<sup>1</sup> School of Law and Government, Dublin City University. Email: [paola.rivetti@dcu.ie](mailto:paola.rivetti@dcu.ie)

<sup>2</sup> Gilbert Achcar, *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Fred Halliday, *Two Hours That Shook the World. 11 September 2001. Causes and Consequences* (London: Saqi Books, 2001).

reforms, contentious politics and economic relations in Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt. By examining the political dynamics in these three countries, where the protests have resulted in very different trajectories of regime re-configuration, the articles identify patterns of both continuity and change and expose the very problematic nature of the notions of 'regime change' and 'regime stability.' For instance, it is rather unclear how to label post-July 2013 political events in Egypt. Some would suggest that there is an inevitable return to the paradigm of authoritarian resilience after a brief interlude of intra-regime negotiations that allowed pluralism to emerge,<sup>4</sup> while others would contend that it is a rather classic case of failed transition and that genuine change is only being suppressed in the short-term.<sup>5</sup> Adopting a different perspective, the special issue aims to examine the process of regime transformation and reconfiguration and brings at the forefront of scholarly attention the similarities and differences in the cases of Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt.

One of the most relevant debates through which the uprisings have been examined centres on the usefulness of the two dominant paradigms in the study of the politics of the Middle East and North Africa, namely transition to democracy and authoritarian resilience.<sup>6</sup> While the study of authoritarian resilience flourished in the past decades and has resulted in theoretically rich accounts for why regimes have been so durable, the examination of political change in the Middle East had suffered for some time from the over-presence of 'transitology,' as detailed in numerous works since the mid-2000s.<sup>7</sup> The dominance of the 'transitological approach' to political change has determined a sort of neglect of a serious analysis of how Middle Eastern societies have actually changed, to the point that criticising 'transitology' became academically more appropriate than engaging social or political change. Studies on activism and social change did abound in the field, but a 'transitological bias' characterised them and it is only after mid-2000s that scholars engaged civil society alliance-building, activism and social movements in authoritarian contexts with no teleological focus on democratisation.<sup>8</sup> In fact, it is not a coincidence that scholarly interest for authoritarian resilience emerged after criticism of 'transitology' had become established in the field of Middle Eastern studies. The uprisings contributed to make clear that these two dominant paradigms - democratisation and authoritarian resilience - are far too rigid to grasp and explain the complexities on the ground. Indeed, both paradigms understand social and

---

<sup>4</sup> Steven Heydemann and Reinoud Leenders, 'Authoritarian learning and authoritarian resilience: regime responses to the "Arab Awakening"' *Globalizations* 8, 5 (2011): 647-653.

<sup>5</sup> Nathan Brown, 'Egypt's Failed Transition' *Journal of Democracy* 24, 4 (2013): 45-58.

<sup>6</sup> See the debate generated by Marc Morjé Howard and Meir R. Walters, 'Explaining the Unexpected: Political Science and the Surprises of 1989 and 2011,' *Perspectives on Politics* 12, 2 (2014): 394-408 and in particular, Ellen Lust, 'Response to Howard and Walters,' *Perspectives on Politics* 12, 2 (2014): 413-414.

<sup>7</sup> Lisa Anderson, 'Searching where the light shines: Studying democratization in the Middle East' *Annual Review of Political Science*, 9 (2006): 189-214; Raymond Hinnebusch, 'Authoritarian persistence, democratization theory and the Middle East: An overview and critique' *Democratization* 13, 3 (2006): 373-395. More recently: Andres C. Härdig, 'Beyond the Arab revolts: conceptualizing civil society in the Middle East and North Africa,' *Democratization* (2014). Available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13510347.2014.917626>.

<sup>8</sup> See: Janine Clark, *Islam, charity, and activism: Middle-class networks and social welfare in Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); James Sater, *Civil society and political change in Morocco* (London: Routledge, 2007); Andrea Liverani, *Civil society in Algeria. The political functions of associational life* (London: Routledge, 2008) and more recently: Francesco Cavatorta and Vincent Durac, *Civil Society and Democratization in the Arab World: The Dynamics of Activism* (London: Routledge, 2010).

political phenomena as conducive to either democratisation or to the strengthening of authoritarianism, displaying a degree of inflexibility that prevented scholars from 'seeing' the uprisings coming.

This does not mean that the scholarship should have predicted the uprisings,<sup>9</sup> but more attention should have been given to actors and processes that were considered irrelevant or marginal and turned out instead to be extremely significant. In addition, although the outbreak of the protests has in some cases re-boosted scholarly interest for the democratisation paradigm<sup>10</sup> and 'democracy spotting',<sup>11</sup> it can be legitimately argued that even if successful transitions to democracy were to occur, democratisation theories would be ill-equipped to account for them.<sup>12</sup> This is the case not only because a different set of marginal actors, others than the 'usual middle-class suspects' of mainstream democratisation theories, have been empowered as the protagonists of the protests, but also because state-society contentious relations have been developing differently from the template provided by orthodox theories of transitions to democracy.

Thus, the most important aim of this special issue is to invite scholars to look for relevant political processes in specific *loci* of negotiation and conflict amongst social and political actors, exploring the contradictions between the literature and the actual dynamics on the ground while re-considering some of the seemingly granitic assumptions of both democratisation and authoritarian resilience. In order to offer an empirically-grounded substantiation of this, the special issue compares and contrasts three case studies. While the uprisings have followed very different trajectories in Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt, some of the contributions to this special issue demonstrate that the dynamics of continuity and change may be surprisingly similar in the three countries. For instance, Gianluca Parolin's revealing analysis of the processes of constitution-making in Tunisia and Egypt exposes the attempt on the part of the political elites in both countries to exclude radical revolutionary fringes in order to be able to proceed with moderate and unthreatening 'pacted constitutions.' Adam Hanieh's comparative examination of the negotiations between the three North African regimes and international financial institutions also reveals common characteristics in the content and logic of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank lending conditions to these three countries.

To be sure, there are also important differences in the way in which Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt have gone through the uprisings and subsequent political turmoil. Some contributors

---

<sup>9</sup> As correctly pointed out by: Marc Lynch, 'Response to Howard and Walters,' *Perspectives on Politics* 12, 2 (2014): 415-416.

<sup>10</sup> Alfred Stepan, 'Tunisia's Transition and the Twin Tolerations,' *Journal of Democracy* 23, 2 (2012): 89-103.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Hudson, 'Awakening, Cataclysm, or just a Series of Events? Reflections on the Current Wave of Protest in the Arab World', *Jadaliyya*, 16/5/2011 (<http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/1601/awakening-cataclysm-or-just-a-series-of-events-ref>, accessed 23/9/2014).

<sup>12</sup> As already pointed out by Laura Guazzone and Daniela Pioppi (eds.) *The Arab State and Neo-Liberal Globalization: The Restructuring of State Power in the Middle East* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2009); Michelle Pace and Francesco Cavatorta, 'The Arab uprisings in theoretical perspective—an introduction,' *Mediterranean Politics* 17, 2 (2012): 125-138; and, more recently, by Ricardo René Laremont (ed.) *Revolution, Revolt and Reform in North Africa: The Arab Spring and Beyond* (London: Routledge, 2013); Lina Khatib and Ellen Lust (eds.), *Taking to the Streets: The Transformation of Arab Activism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

demonstrate that the stark differences the three case studies present can be enlightening as to why dynamics of change and continuity have unfolded following specific national patterns, thus shedding further light on the workings of politics in the region. In this sense, the comparative analysis proposed by Raymond Hinnebusch of post-independence state-formation processes and path-dependent institutional and social conditions of the three countries is of particular significance. In fact, it sets out the factors and processes that have determined the patterns followed by the uprisings – with a look to likely future political and social developments. In a similar vein, Florian Kohstall's comparative examination of higher education reforms in Egypt and Morocco elucidates the different approaches to reform that the Moroccan monarchy and Mubarak's administration had adopted, elaborating on the two regimes' different management of contention and revolt, thus illuminating the reason why the uprisings had such different outcomes in the two countries.

The focus on specific actors, policies or processes is rewarding also in the case of articles focusing on individual countries, such as Raquel Ojeda García and Ángela Suárez Collado's detailed examination of regionalisation policy in Morocco; Fabio Merone's sharp class-based analysis of the Tunisian revolutionary process and emergence of the Salafist Ansar al-Sharia; Matt Buehler's insightful examination of trade unions in Morocco; and Rosita Di Peri's in-depth analysis of the tourist sector of Tunisia. All these articles indeed stress a common dynamic throughout North Africa, namely that actors, be they the Moroccan King or Tunisia's radical Islamic revolutionary constituencies, have tried to turn to their advantage the 'revolutionary' moment created by widespread protests, seizing or attempting to seize the opportunities political turmoil offered, no matter what the broader scenario, whether regime survival or change, might have been. However, not all attempts at seizing these 'windows of opportunities' resulted in success with some actors failing spectacularly to do so, as the contributors explain in their analysis.<sup>13</sup> Regardless of the final result, the articles highlight the relevance of the transnational dimension of the 'Arab Spring.' In fact, this was of crucial importance both to national actors, because they could make their protests resonating within a wider, international arena, and to authoritarian regimes, as their fear of being wiped away resulted in 'authoritarian learning.' In order to grasp these dynamics, the focus on specific actors and policies is of great help, as it allows for a detailed analysis of complex processes unfolding on the ground. In fact events in the region highlight that, beyond authoritarian resilience or democratic transformation, there are deeper and more enduring trajectories of continuity and change in the way in which actors and structures interact.

### **Regime reconfiguration and the historicity of the uprisings**

Although the uprisings have exposed a number of contradictions, the tendency to focus on regimes' broad transformations has continued and the conclusion of this special issue partially returns the theme. However this almost exclusive focus has led to underestimate

---

<sup>13</sup> See: Francesco Cavatorta, 'No democratic change... and yet no authoritarian continuity. The inter-paradigm debate and North Africa after the uprisings,' *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, 1 (2015).

more subtle and partially more obscure political dynamics and, once again, to concentrate the attention on either broad canvas of change or granitic continuity when in fact the reality might not be so stark. In this sense, the consensus on the open-ended nature of the uprisings is a step in the right direction, but does not tell us much about what has actually changed or remained the same. In order to address this issue, Valbjørn and Bank's had suggested to examine 'actual continuity in the apparent changes' and the 'actual changes in the apparent continuity' is useful. Thus, already before the uprisings, the two authors invited the scholarly community to focus on the

'changes *within* regimes (e.g., a transformation from populist to post-populist authoritarianism), *in* the relations with the opposition (e.g., the changing regime/Islamist parties dynamics) and *within* the latter (e.g., an emerging cooperation between the secular Left and Islamists), and finally changes *in* the society at large (e.g., the emergence of alternative orders coexisting in parallel with the official political order).'

<sup>14</sup>

Drawing on this point, the special issue aims to advance our knowledge of the ongoing dynamics operating outside the rigidity of 'regime change' or 'regime survival.' In this sense, it seems productive to focus on the reconfigurations of policies and political processes. Indeed, no regime surviving the uprisings has remained the same and no 'new' regime in place after the uprisings is entirely new and, in this sense, the study of policy-making process and policies seems a very appropriate and fertile 'venue' for research.

Following on from this, the special issue aims to make two substantial contributions to the scholarship. The first is to bring continuity and change at the forefront of scholarly interest by examining specific case studies in the realm of politics and policy-making. In particular, by adopting a micro- or meso-perspective of empirical analysis, the special issue targets the co-existence of factors of change in contexts characterised by political stability and, vice-versa, the persistence of elements of continuity (in terms of elite composition and values, institutional resilience, unchanged policies, governance structure, top-down approach to policy-making and securitisation of societies and politics) in contexts of broad change.<sup>15</sup> Here, the suggestion<sup>16</sup> of examining the meta-meaning of the democratisation studies toolkit is taken on board: 'continuity' and 'change' do not equate with 'authoritarian continuity' and 'democratic change,' and do not constitute a meritocratic scale according to which change is

---

<sup>14</sup> Morten Valbjørn and André Bank, 'Examining the "post" in post-democratization: The future of Middle Eastern political rule through lenses of the past,' *Middle East Critique* 19, 3 (2010): 188.

<sup>15</sup> This is not new to social and political scientists from other fields. For example, social scientists of the post-second World War era in Europe already underlined the strong continuity in the Italian political system before and after 1945 in terms of elite composition, political and business networks and elite values. See Salvatore Lupo, *Il fascismo: la politica in un regime totalitario* (Roma: Donzelli Editore, 2005). For a similar approach to Eastern European political configurations before and after the fall of Communism, see Andrew C. Janos, 'Continuity and change in Eastern Europe: Strategies of post-Communist politics,' *East European Politics & Societies* 8, 1 (1993): 1-31.

<sup>16</sup> Andrea Teti, 'Beyond Lies the Wub: The Challenges of (Post) Democratization,' *Middle East Critique* 21, 1 (2012): 5-24.

preferable to continuity. In particular, the empirical, micro and meso-level analysis this special issue offers aims to provide insights about the real degree of change and continuity in North African political and economic systems. For instance, after regimes changed and new governments came to power in Egypt and Tunisia, it is unclear whether and to which extent the personnel of former regimes still play a role in decision-making processes. This is a relevant issue because it impacts on the extent to which actual change can be brought about by political and business elites still connected with previous regimes. Factors of continuity can be very visible and evident, as in the case of the role played by the Army in Egypt, but they may also be present in less visible sectors of the political, social and economic life. What are, for instance, the degrees of change and continuity in specific policy sectors, such as higher education in Egypt or tourism in Tunisia, if we contrast the pre- and post-uprisings eras? To what extent the inclusion of Islamist political forces in Tunisia helped to remake a new, post-Ben Ali Tunisia? In the case of Morocco, similar questions can be asked not only in connection to the apparent 'politics of compromise' that the monarchy carries out when threatened by political mobilisation or by the popular consensus of Islamist groups<sup>17</sup>; but also in connection to labour policies and labour-related contentious politics, which might have introduced elements of change despite the broader scenario of monarchical continuity. More generally speaking, what are the consequences that specific post-uprisings policies and reforms – regionalisation policy and constitutional reforms to name just two – may engender in the future, considering the stability of the monarchy-centred political configuration of Morocco? Accordingly, elements of both rupture and stability are present at the same time. To be sure, scholars have already been preoccupied with some of these issues and have already attempted to answer some of these questions, denouncing that 'dictators have gone but regimes have remained in place';<sup>18</sup> this special issue however expands such an analysis through a more nuanced examination of the micro-processes that do operate beneath the apparent regime survival.

The second contribution this special issue makes is drawing attention to the historicity of the uprisings. In the context of the debate about the uprisings as a long- or short-term phenomenon, the contributions to the special issue highlight that protests have been the result of long-term processes<sup>19</sup> which have engendered novel trajectories. This is the case, for instance, of new technologies and social media which, capitalising on past mobilisations, have been a new and relevant feature in the protests and which may change future mobilisation

---

<sup>17</sup> Mohamed Daadaoui, *Moroccan Monarchy and the Islamist Challenge: Maintaining Makhzen Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> Vincent Durac, 'Protest movements and political change: an analysis of the 'Arab uprisings' of 2011', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 31, 2 (2013): 175-193; Marina Ottaway, 'The presidents left, the regimes are still there,' Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 14/2/2011 (<http://carnegieendowment.org/2011/02/14/presidents-left-regimes-are-still-here>, accessed 23/9/2014); Eva Bellin, 'Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring', *Comparative Politics* 44, 2 (2012): 127-149; Ellis Goldberg, 'Mubarakism Without Mubarak. Why Egypt's Military Will Not Embrace Democracy', *Foreign Affairs* 11/2/2011 (<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67416/ellis-goldberg/mubarakism-without-mubarak>, accessed 23/9/2014).

<sup>19</sup> Achcar, *The People Want* cit.; Koenraad Bogaert, 'Contextualizing the Arab revolts: the politics behind three decades of neoliberalism in the Arab World', *Middle East Critique* 22, 3 (2013): 213-234.



patterns for good.<sup>20</sup> The heterogeneity of time frames at work in the aftermath of the uprisings includes the *longue durée* of an enduring colonialism, which has taken new forms but still is present in the policy *imprimatur* of former colonies, as the case of Tunisia's process of identity-building and Morocco's regionalisation policy demonstrate<sup>21</sup>; the medium *durée* of the post-independence period, characterised by political authoritarianism and its several transformations, decompressions and retrenchments,<sup>22</sup> and by the dependence on international financial institutions, which has become seemingly irrevocable despite popular demands during the uprisings<sup>23</sup>; and the most recent, post-uprisings *durée*, where enduring and non-linear pattern of contention meet relatively new trajectories of institution-building generating further changes, as the politics of constitution-making and constitutional reform demonstrate in all of North African countries.<sup>24</sup> Such plurality of time frames is highlighted in the 'moment' of the uprisings, which represent a watershed for those time frames, and generate change and continuity. These different time frames are intertwined and contribute to shape continuity and change. There is no over-determination on the part of specific time frames, as long-term tendencies have been reshaped and refashioned by events which have taken place in the mid- and short-term. The result is a dialogical effect, where all the different *durées* are connected and impact on each other. Thus, looking at the dynamics of change and continuity allows for a stretching of our historical perspective, which has often been concerned with the most recent events taking place in the region because of their rapidly changing and often puzzling nature. The 'change and continuity' framework allows for exploring specific political and social processes in a temporal flux.

Although the uprisings remain a watershed in national and international history, determining when the uprisings have actually started and when they terminated is a rather difficult, if not impossible, task. For example, revolutions both in Egypt and Tunisia underwent several waves of mobilisation and regime configuration since late 2010. In addition, revolutions can be temporally framed in different ways according to the subject accounting for them. In this sense the case of Morocco is very interesting because, despite the fact that the regime has not lost its supreme authority as it happened in Egypt and Tunisia, the

---

<sup>20</sup> Marc Lynch, 'Media, old and new,' in Lynch (ed.), *The Arab Uprisings explained. New contentious politics in the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014): 93-110; Ricardo René Laremont, 'Demographics, Economics and Technology: background to the North African revolution,' in Laremont (ed.), *Revolution, Revolt and Reform in North Africa*, cit., 15-30.

<sup>21</sup> Fabio Merone, 'Enduring class struggle in Tunisia: the fight for identity beyond Political Islam,' *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, 1 (2015); Raquel Ojeda García and Ángela Suárez Collado, 'The project of advanced regionalisation in Morocco. Analysis of a Lampedusian reform,' *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, 1 (2015).

<sup>22</sup> Raymond Hinnebusch, 'Change and Continuity after the Arab Uprising: The Consequences of State Formation in Arab North African States,' *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, 1 (2015); Florian Kohstall, 'From reform to resistance: Universities and student mobilisation in Egypt and Morocco before and after the Arab Uprisings,' *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, 1 (2015); Matt Buehler, 'Labour Demands, Regime Concessions: Moroccan Unions and the Arab Uprising,' *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, 1 (2015).

<sup>23</sup> Adam Hanieh, 'Shifting Priorities or Business as Usual? Continuity and Change in the post-2011 IMF and World Bank Engagement with Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt,' *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, 1 (2015); Rosita Di Peri, 'An enduring "touristic miracle" in Tunisia? Coping with old challenges after the revolution,' *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, 1 (2015).

<sup>24</sup> Gianluca Parolin, 'Constitutions against Revolutions. Political Participation in North Africa,' *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, 1 (2015).

country is undergoing an everlasting process of change, whose leading trigger is however shifting between the king and social opposition.<sup>25</sup> It is no coincidence then that the special issue calls for the analysis of specific phenomena in a time framework that can be stretched according to the actors observed. Thus, the micro- and meso-approach adopted by the contributions to this special issue allows for a grounded examination of specific aspects of the political, social and economic life in the countries, generating detailed analysis and empirically and theoretically rich contributions.

Finally, this approach highlights at best the benefits the scholarship may have from the 'methodological encounter' between the micro-analysis of processes and policies on the one hand, and the historicity of the uprisings on the other hand. These two dimensions are indeed intertwined, and enable us to shift away from the immediate 'democracy spotting' as well as from the 'authoritarian stalemate' paradigm, while revealing the complexity and richness of the phenomena under consideration.

### **Mapping continuity and change**

In order to highlight all of the points discussed above, the special issue offers a broad spectrum of articles that touch upon three clusters of issues. The first set of issues relates to the process of state building, which has profoundly affected the outcomes of the uprisings in the three countries and which, in turn, has been deeply affected by them after regime change and reconfiguration. Raymond Hinnebusch comparatively reflects on the impact that the long-term process of state-building in the three North African countries has had on the outcome of the protests, highlighting the relevant role that 'distinctive packages of authority (seen through Weberian lenses), institution-society relations (via Modernization Theory) and political economy infrastructures (Marxism)' have played in the explanation as to why we had such diversified trajectories despite the many similarities displayed by the protests. Hinnebusch offers a compelling example of how the uprisings have been influenced by the *longue* and medium *durée* of post-independence state-building, providing an analysis of how longer historical dynamics meet short-term events.

Raquel Ojeda García and Ángela Suárez Collado on Morocco and Gianluca Parolin on Egypt, Tunisia and Libya provide examples of how policy-making and institution-building processes have been influenced by the uprisings. The authors do so by examining in depth the seizing of the 'windows of opportunity' provided by the uprisings on the part of various national political actors in the three countries. Raquel Ojeda García and Ángela Suárez Collado examine the advanced regionalisation reform in Morocco, whose launch took place after the eruption of protests in Morocco and which constituted an instrument in the hands of the king to respond to political turmoil and discontent. Indeed, the two authors contend that the

---

<sup>25</sup> See: Driss Maghraoui, 'Constitutional reforms in Morocco: between consensus and subaltern politics,' *The Journal of North African Studies* 16, 4 (2011): 679-699; Irene Fernández Molina, 'The monarchy vs. the 20 February Movement: who holds the reins of political change in Morocco?,' *Mediterranean politics* 16, 3 (2011): 435-441.

regionalisation project is part of the broader 'never-ending reform package' that, more generally, characterises the Moroccan system to ensure its continuity as a stable executive monarchy. In this respect, the two authors highlight the paradoxical display of a 'theatre of change' in a reality of continuity, whereby the king was successful in portraying himself as the proponent of change, by exploiting the novelty and the transformations brought about by the regionalisation reform, in a context of continuity with the pre-uprisings era.

Gianluca Parolin comparatively examines the processes of constitution-making in Tunisia and Egypt, focusing on the shifting power balance and power-sharing agreements among the different factions that have taken part in it. Parolin's analysis aims to examine North Africa's 'constitution-making stories' by assessing the role of the actors that influenced or even 'captured' those processes, thus exposing continuity and change in terms of elite self-preservation. The overarching conclusion is that constitution-making processes can be instruments of continuity not only because they may be participated by the old elite or by factions linked to the former regime; but also because they are widely regarded as a crucial step in the stabilisation of newly reconfigured political regimes at the expenses of people's political participation. With the goal of making his argument more compelling, Parolin contrasts the case of the constitution-making process in Libya with the one of Egypt and Tunisia, in order to explore a case of failed stabilisation through the constitution-making process. The conclusion the author reaches is interesting because he highlights how failed stabilisation (Libya) may paradoxically result in more democratic and inclusive constitution-making processes than those in successfully stabilised countries (Tunisia and Egypt), where the constitution-making processes have been smoother at the expense of political inclusion and participation.

The second set of issues the contributions to the special issue explore is related to contentious politics. Contentious politics is obviously a crucial dimension for the examination of the post-uprisings North Africa, and the articles shed light on two aspects. The first is how and whether the uprisings have changed the dynamics of contestation and activism, while the second aspect revolves around how and to what extent the ruling authorities have changed their attitude towards mobilisation and discontent as a result of the uprisings. Florian Kohstall and Fabio Merone insightfully underline the relevance of the medium and *longue durée* in the examination of revolutionary or protest movements, highlighting that national authorities may follow a path-dependent pattern in dealing with them. Indeed, the specific configuration of regimes and their ability of coping with threats of mobilisation significantly impact on the characteristics of post-uprisings political arena. On the contrary, while not neglecting the *longue durée* of Morocco's labour-related mobilisations, Matt Buehler's article demonstrates how contemporary events, such as the fall of regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, have had an impact on Moroccan authorities' attitude towards political contention, weakening their resistance to yield to workers' demands while strengthening the workers and trade unions.

Florian Kostall's article deals with university politics and education reforms in Egypt and Morocco, and comparatively examines how the different management of such reforms links to the uprisings and their contrasting outcomes. Kohstall contends that, contrary to Egypt, the Moroccan monarchy has so far resisted protests and even regime overthrown thanks to a

more 'dynamic' blend of reform and repression – a successful 'blend' the monarchy used to introduce education reforms too and to cope with the discontent they generated. Indeed, the Moroccan higher education reform introduced a new form of governance in public universities whereas in Egypt, the government established a parallel system through the mushrooming of private universities. These different systems of governance emerging in the two countries partly reflect the different political configuration of the two regimes, with Morocco being characterised by party pluralism beneath the hegemony of the king and, on the contrary, Egypt having been dominated for a long time by a quasi one-party system – with some features that the uprisings did not succeed in challenging and transforming. This difference also explains the trajectory and outcome of state-society contention in the two countries.

Fabio Merone explores the continuities and changes in the field of contentious politics in Tunisia through the examination of political inclusion and exclusion before and after the uprisings. He does so by investigating in depth two case studies, namely the inclusion of the moderate Islamic party Al-Nahda and the emergence of the radical Salafist party and social movement Ansar al-Sharia. Through an historical analysis of Al-Nahda's marginalisation from national independence up to the uprising of 2010-2011, Merone builds an innovative argument as he highlights the persistence of old logics in the definition of political inclusion and exclusion in the national political game, which, according to the author, is mainly built on social class cleavages. The emergence of Salafism after the uprisings is of particular relevance, the author argues, in elucidating this. Indeed, while Tunisia's conservative middle class joined the Al-Nahda party, compromising with secular opposition parties but enjoying the benefits of the revolution in exchange, Ansar al-Sharia's disenfranchised constituencies remained excluded both politically and economically. Merone concludes by highlighting the persistence of two continuities in Tunisia's modern history, namely the resilience of a definition of national identity, or *tunisiannité*, built along the acceptance of 'secular modernity' and moderation, and the exploitation of the threat of radical Islamism to mystify social class exclusion.

Matt Buehler examines labour protests in Morocco before and after the 2011 protests, and highlights the crucial importance that regional turmoil and disorders had in allowing trade unions to strategically use the 'revolutionary' moment to advance their demands. The author carries out an historical analysis of trade union's strategies and struggles in Morocco with the purpose of illuminating the readership on the long process existing behind the outbreak of political discontent in the country, with more general mobilisation and workers' protests existing since French colonialism. However protests increased since 2010 and, in the context of North African mobilisations and revolutionary processes, threats of disorders became very efficacious thus allowing the trade unions to see their demands accepted.

The third and last set of issues the special issue explores relates to the economy. More specifically, Adam Hanieh and Rosita Di Peri adopts two distinctive perspective (international political economy and domestic economy) to examine the dynamics of continuity and change in two crucial sectors of the economy of Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt, namely their relation to international financial institutions on the one side, and Tunisia's touristic industry on the

other side. Interestingly enough the two authors, while not overlooking the transformations they detected in their in depth examinations of the economic sectors, contend that continuity has prevailed over change.

Rosita Di Peri details her analysis of the tourist industry of Tunisia by investigating the history and characteristics of it since the independence. By recalling this long history, she is able to identify two main constants, or *thawabit*. The first is the persistence of a touristic and developmental model, which have traditionally been interconnected in Tunisia, based on the '3S' (Sun Sand and Sea) despite the economic and financial evidence of its major weaknesses, in particular during the past decade. The second continuity is the persistence of tourism as the centrepiece of the narrative of the 'new Tunisia.' The author's analysis is convincing in arguing that, because of its economic success, the touristic model of Tunisia has been self-reinforcing for decades, thus making a change rather difficult. In addition, its economic relevance and credibility at the international level has made its characteristics and nature even more resilient. Therefore, it is not surprising that the national authorities, both before and after the revolution, have exploited tourism as the core of a narrative of (their) national success. Di Peri's analysis is interesting as it makes an important point when examining the issue of continuity and change after major political events. In fact, she suggests that political and social actors might not be able to seize the new opportunities the revolution offers, as it happened in the case of Tunisia's operators of the touristic sectors which have not exploited the chance to impose a significant shift in the industry to their benefit. This argument counter balances other contributions, although Di Peri does not overlook the novelties and new experiences that have been taking off in the realm of sustainable and local tourism in particular.

Adam Hanieh comparatively examines the International Monetary Fund and World Bank's engagement with Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt, and asks as to what extent change and continuity can be observed in the negotiations between them. The article finds that despite the widespread condemnation of neo-liberal economic policies by activists and various political groups during the uprisings, and despite the rhetorical commitment on the part of the IFIs to reinforce attention to social issues, little has changed. States and national business elites have not raised any significant opposition to the economic policies associated with the two financial institutions, and negotiations with them have continued along the same trajectory as under previous rulers. However, Hanieh concludes his contributions by highlighting the existence of some degrees of change, or as he puts it 'rearticulating continuity,' beneath the continuity of practices and policies characterising his case studies. He points out to the ongoing mobilisation and turmoil in North Africa, which may affect the continuity of IFI policies considering that potential political disorder remains of significant concern to policy makers, who may turn their indulgence into bolder attitudes should turmoil continue.

Existing scholarly examinations of the uprisings and their consequences can hardly answer all of the questions we ask as academics and observers, and further research into their causes, trajectories and effects will be of great benefit to our knowledge and understanding of the actual dynamic on the ground. With the ambition of contributing to this advancement, this

special issue targets an aspect, namely the one of continuity and change, which has not been considered in a consistent and substantial way. Adopting a regional, comparative scope, the special issue hopes to shed some light on the questions raised.

**Acknowledgements** I am grateful to Rosita Di Peri, the BJMES editorial board, all the authors contributing to this special issue and all blind reviewers that accepted to review the manuscripts. I would also like to thank Florian Kohstall for his comments on early drafts of the introduction. All mistakes are of course my only responsibility.

# Change and Continuity after the Arab Uprising: The Consequences of State Formation in Arab North African States

RAYMOND HINNEBUSCH<sup>26</sup>

*ABSTRACT This article provides a comparative macro-level overview of political development in Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt. It examines their evolution from the colonial period through several distinct phases, showing how differences in their origins was followed over time by a certain convergence toward a common post-populist form of authoritarianism, albeit still distinguished according to monarchic and republican legitimacy principles. On this basis, it assesses how past state formation trajectories made the republics more vulnerable to the Arab Uprising but also what differences they make for the prospects of post-Uprising democratisation: while in Morocco the monarch's legitimacy allows it to continue divide and rule politics, in Egypt, the army's historic central role in politics has been restored while in Tunisia, the trade union movement has facilitated a greater democratic transition.*

How far can the state formation paths of North African (NA) states help us understand the variable impact of the Arab Uprising on them? Historical sociology's concept of 'path dependency'<sup>27</sup> shows that history matters: the past tangents of states' formation close off some possibilities and make others more likely. While the Uprising was spectacularly the product of *agency*--reaction against the previous features of the regional states, *structure*--the durable inheritances from the past have

---

<sup>26</sup> School of International Relations, University of St Andrews. Email: rh10@st-andrews.ac.uk

<sup>27</sup> James Mahoney, 'Path Dependence in Historical Sociology,' *Theory and Society* 29, 4 (2000): 507-48.

constrained the outcomes of agency. As Marx put it, men make their own history but not in circumstances of their own choosing.

This article examines the literature on state formation in Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt for evidence of how far it explains different mixes of continuity and change under the impact of the Arab Uprising, notably differences regarding the displacement or survival of the incumbent regime and also the extent to which the old authoritarian politics has been superseded by democratisation or has persisted in new forms.<sup>28</sup> The aim is to provide a macro-historical context for the more contemporary micro studies that follow in this special issue.

The article assesses the effect of the three regimes' distinctive packages of authority (seen through Weberian lenses), institution-society relations (via Modernisation Theory) and political economy infrastructures (via Marxism). These approaches have dominated the state formation literature on the region and although each focuses on a particular—but indispensable—part of the picture, they can be subsumed loosely within historical sociology's very broad church. Indeed, following the Marxist tradition, they can be seen as conceptually distinct interacting layers of a pyramidal structure, with the economic 'infrastructure' the base, elites (and social movements) the apex and institution-society relations, the intermediate layer. Elites and social movements provide agency while institutions and economic infrastructure constitute the structure, with each interacting to explain outcomes.

### **The colonial heritage**

The starting point of state formation in North Africa (NA) goes back at least to the colonial period. Because the imperial powers merely took over and ruled through functioning pre-modern regimes,

---

<sup>28</sup> For an insightful historical overview of the region, see Michael J. Willis, *Politics and Power in the Maghreb: Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco from Independence to the Arab Spring* (Columbia/Hurst: Columbia University Press, 2012).



NA states started independence with more secure identities than the many regional states newly created by imperialism. Second, colonial rule, in introducing secular education, precipitated secular nationalist movements that, to an extent, marginalised Islam, thereby introducing enduring societal cleavages over the role of religion in public life. Thirdly, differences in regime type were shaped by the interaction of monarchs with the colonial power: where they were seen to collaborate with imperialism, they were pushed aside in the transition to independence, with the nationalist movement in Tunisia and the army in Egypt constituting alternative pillars of the post-independence republics; by contrast the conflicts of Morocco's King with the French endowed the monarchy with a nationalist legitimacy that kept it as the centre of the post-independence state.

As will be seen below, the first phase in post-independence state formation (1945-70) further accentuated the initial divergences between the regimes, particularly between 'traditional' Morocco and the 'modernising' republics. Thereafter, however, a convergence among them was driven first by similar neo-patrimonial state consolidation strategies (1970-1990) and later by similar neoliberal 'authoritarian upgrading' (1990-2010), which, in turn, generalized similar grievances manifested in the Arab Uprising. Yet, remaining regime differences appear to explain greater post-Uprising continuity in Morocco and divergences in the extent of democratisation in Egypt and Tunisia.

### **Independence and modernisation (1945-70)**

Analyses of NA state formation in the first decades of independence was largely framed by modernisation theory, notably classics by Halpern and Huntington. A main theme was the mobilisation of new actors, notably the middle class, into politics and the rise of middle class-led modernising regimes.<sup>29</sup> The building of new authority was seen as requiring that expanding

---

<sup>29</sup> Manfred Halpern, *The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

participation be channelled through stable institutions; otherwise, 'praetorian' struggles for power on the streets and via military coups and countercoups destabilised regimes.<sup>30</sup> Political effectiveness was measured by how far institutions performed vital political functions such as recruiting political elites, aggregating society interests and mobilising support. Regimes were distinguished, in terms of Weber's authority types,<sup>31</sup> according to their relative concentration of power for radical change or its constraint by tradition or legal institutions. In the period after independence, regimes diverged sharply: the new republics concentrated power for modernising 'revolutions' while monarchies put it in the service of 'tradition.' At least as compared to the Mashreq, however, key NA states stood out for their seeming greater ability to advance modernisation and contain praetorianism.

Republican Tunisia was the 'poster child' of modernisation theorists.<sup>32</sup> The Tunisian state came to independence with important advantages. A small homogeneous society, Tunisia had a cohesive elite recruited from professionals sharing similar upper middle class, regional and educational backgrounds and the experience of the independence struggle. The regime, headed by the charismatic founder of the nation, Habib Bourguiba, enjoyed the ideological hegemony of a successful independence struggle and rested on a mass party incorporating middle class activists, the Islamic bourgeoisie, and a highly developed trade union movement. The regime was seen as the most effective in NA at development, notably via investment in education and modernisation of agriculture thru cooperatives. Its 'soft' version of populist authoritarianism put concentrated power in the service of rational development, albeit at some cost in institutionalisation.

Morocco's monarchy also came to independence with an important advantage: by contrast to the Western-created monarchies of the Levant and Gulf, Morocco's had deep historical roots, uncontested traditional legitimacy and the added legitimacy of its king's alignment with the

---

<sup>30</sup> Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

<sup>31</sup> Max Weber, *Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Free Press, 1964) 324-406.

<sup>32</sup> Clement Henry Moore, *Politics in North Africa: Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia* (Boston: Little Brown, 1970).

nationalist movement against the French colonizer. On the other hand, however, Morocco, resembled those Arab countries, such as Egypt, where monarchies fell in the revolutions of the 1950s and 1960s, in the large size of its cities, much lesser role of tribalism, large impoverished population and lack of oil wealth, combined with a fairly developed political society. It had a strong nationalist independence movement, the Istiqlal party, based on the urban commercial bourgeoisie and a mass incorporating opposition party of the left linked to the unions (the UNFP and its successors). This complexity of political society required the king be an effective politician in order to survive.

The consensus verdict among modernisation theorists at the end of the first decade of independence depicted Morocco as an ‘immobile monarchy,’<sup>33</sup> eschewing modernisation and preserving tradition. The ‘Commander of the Faithful’ enjoyed enormous powers of patronage, including the constitutional power to dissolve parliament and appoint its upper house, thus weakening the elected parliament. He was seen to rule by exploiting Morocco’s divisions, balancing between Berber, rural notable and city Arabs. He used the pro-monarchic notable parties, which delivered the conservative rural votes of clientalised peasants and pastoralists, to contain the politically mobilised cities. The Berber tribal recruited army and interior ministry were turned into royal fiefdoms and used to repress the urban nationalist-left. Governments were picked from a rotating menu of king’s men and the bourgeois opposition politicians recruited via family connections from a small upper strata of landlords and rich merchants satisfied with the status quo. Decision-making was paralysed, with landed interests obstructing land reform and education preserved as an elitist bastion. While the monarchy was congruent with still dominant traditional structures, it was being de-legitimised in the eyes of the emerging modern middle class.

---

<sup>33</sup> Moore, *Politics in North Africa*, cit.; John Waterbury, *The Commander of the Faithful: the Moroccan political elite; a study of segmented politics* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970).

Egypt was a coherent society similar to Tunisia and also with its own distinct historic identity, although suffering from the worst resource to population deficit in the region. By contrast to Morocco, the monarchy and landed oligarchy were quickly overthrown once British protection diminished. Weberian writings, such as Dekmejian's *Egypt under Nasser*,<sup>34</sup> interpreted the authority of the first republican president as charismatic, resting on his anti-imperialist foreign policy victories. Attempts were made to institutionalise the leader's legitimacy in institutions, the presidency, but also parliament and in various versions of the ruling single party that were meant to incorporate pro-regime participation but which were seen as weak and chiefly instruments of control. Less sympathetic writers framed Free Officer rule as 'praetorian.'<sup>35</sup> Political economy approaches, such as those of Abdul Malik and Ayubi, saw Egypt as a modernising bureaucratic state fostering import substitute industrialisation to deal with land to population constraints; nationalisations of banking and industry and agrarian reform were breaking the hold of the old oligarchy over the economy and giving the regime the means to co-opt the masses.<sup>36</sup> Egypt's revolution significantly levelled what had been an oligarchic social structure. Indeed, Egypt's more thorough social reforms, especially land reform, which had no analogue in either Tunisia or Morocco, produced significantly lower long-term inequality levels (a Gini index of 33 in the late 1990s compared to 40 in the latter cases). Egypt was widely seen as a successful model in much of the Arab world during the pan-Arab era.

### **Regime Consolidation (1970-90)**

---

<sup>34</sup> R. Hrair Dekmejian, *Egypt under Nasir: A study in political dynamics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1971).

<sup>35</sup> Amos Perlmutter, *Egypt, the Praetorian State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

<sup>36</sup> Anwar Abdul Malik, *Egypt: Military Society* (New York: Vantage Books, 1968); Nazih Ayubi, *Bureaucracy and Politics in Contemporary Egypt* (London: Ithaca Press, 1980).

If the 1950-60s appeared to be a period of radical change and mobilisation, the next two decades were ones of regime consolidation and de-mobilisation. In the republics, the main change, in Weberian terms, was the 'routinisation' of charismatic legitimacy in some combination of neo-patrimonial leadership and rational institutions, while in Morocco the monarchy's persistent traditional legitimacy and political dexterity allowed it to survive a period of major crisis.<sup>37</sup>

Two iconic collections edited by Zartman et. al. explained regime consolidation in terms of increased institutionalisation.<sup>38</sup> Power was seen as conferred by top office in the centralised Tunisian and Egyptian republics. Office made the man, elites typically originating in modest societal strata, rising through occupations such as the military and teaching, from which they were co-opted into elite ranks. The technocracy, more interested in efficiency and growth than redistribution, had moved to the centre of decision-making somewhat at the expense of the party politicians and military officers recruited from the first post-independence generation. In parallel, the oil wealth available in the region from the mid-1970s price boom provided patronage for clientelist strategies and neo-patrimonial practices that made regimes more autonomous of society. In Marxist accounts, the first generation elite of modest origins used its command of the public sector to enrich itself, consolidating a new privileged and status quo-oriented state bourgeoisie at the heart of the state.<sup>39</sup> If the holders of private wealth still only enjoyed uneven access to power, ordinarily people were being demobilised.

Variations in regimes were, however, significant and Morocco's monarchy remained different. Property, traditional status and clientele connections to the monarchy were more important than formal office or technocratic skills in part because the private sector was more developed and the

---

<sup>37</sup> Jean Leca and Yves Schemeil, 'Clientelisme et patrimonialisme dans le monde arabe,' *Revue internationale de science politique*, 4, 4 (1983): 455-494.

<sup>38</sup> William I. Zartman, et al., *Political Elites in Arab North Africa* (New York: Longman, 1982). Adeed Dawisha and William I. Zartman, *Beyond Coercion: the Durability of the Arab State* (London: Croom-Helm, 1988): 61-87.

<sup>39</sup> Mahmoud Hussein, *Class Conflict in Egypt* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973).

lack of land reform kept the rural notability fully intact. Morocco still stood out in the persistence of the traditional elite and lack of elite recruitment from the lower middle strata that was typical in the republics; for its lack of mass incorporation; by the government's disinterest in development programs; and by the absence of ideology in public life. Morocco had never had a populist social contract: however, rent transferred from the Gulf monarchies allowed increased public spending and a burst of growth in the late 1970s. Growth of educated youth with identities shaped by education in Arabic rather than French generated petit bourgeois radicalism formerly seen in the republics. Marked increases in social inequality and mass impoverishment and slowing economic growth as rent declined in the 1980s, combined with increased social mobilisation, were seen to threaten the regime.<sup>40</sup>

Mounting unrest in the late sixties was met by repression and a shutdown of parliamentary life; this, however, left a vacuum, issuing in two attempted military coups in the early 1970s which pushed the king to re-liberalise the political system in 1975. This decision was made easier by the fact that the monarchy had recovered its legitimacy through the annexation of Western Sahara, which won the acclaim of urban nationalist opinion and where also the military could be employed away from politics. The return to political liberalisation strengthened the regime: Zartman highlighted the advantage the Moroccan monarchy enjoyed from allowing opposition parties and semi-competitive elections, with the king periodically forming a government that could include ministers from the loyal opposition; even though ultimate power remained with the palace, competition for office was a means of co-opting and setting ambitious elites against each other. In retrospect, the monarchy's mix of quite selective coercion, the safety valve of greater political

---

<sup>40</sup> Mark Tessler, 'Morocco: Institutional Pluralism and Monarchical Dominance,' in Zartman et. al. (eds.), *Political Elites*, cit., 35-91.

freedoms, and ‘opposition as a form of support,’<sup>41</sup> gave it a greater resiliency than the authoritarian republics.

In Tunisia, the president for life retained unmatched legitimacy within the elite and brokered intra-elite rivalries and circulation. Though tolerant of opposition (with dissidents out of favour later forgiven and readmitted to the elite), Bourguiba nevertheless purged any potential competitors within the ruling party and when the party became too autonomous used the government to weaken it, moving the system toward a neo-patrimonial order. Circulation at the top was blocked by the elderly leadership, with ‘change held in abeyance.’ The party had lost mobilisational capacity while the trade union movement, formerly a regime partner, now led a general strike against it. Small opposition parties were secular liberal or leftist, many of them splinters from the ruling party, with Islamists still on the margins and directing their fire at secularists.

Analysis of Egypt in this period, marked by the transition from Nasser to Sadat, stressed the continuity of a presidential-dominated bureaucratic regime. The presidency did, however, evolve from charismatic to neo-patrimonial authority, with Sadat appealing to religion and tradition to legitimise himself. And this was paralleled by considerable turnover in ministerial and military elites accompanying Sadat’s policy breaks with the past, including the ousting of the Soviet backed Nasserites, periodic waves of further purges of centre-left elites accompanying economic liberalisation (*infitah*) and then of opponents of the Peace Treaty with Israel. Technocratic recruitment to top elite posts advanced, while ex-revolutionary officers declined. Bureaucratic politics over jurisdictions and clientelist rivalries over patronage replaced ideological conflicts. An experiment in controlled political liberalisation and party pluralism appeased and contained dissident elites whose views were being marginalised without allowing them to mobilise mass support, even as the ruling party reconnected with the rural notability to sustain control in the

---

<sup>41</sup> William I. Zartman, ‘Opposition as a Support of the State,’ in Dawisha and Zartman (eds.), *Beyond Coercion*, cit., 61-87.

villages. Economic opening led to a burst of prosperity, mostly for the well off and increased economic insecurity for the masses as the regime attempted to disengage from the social contract, albeit incrementally owing to fear of mass protest such as that which broke out in 1977. A post-populist transition was shifting the social power balance toward those with wealth and against Nasser's populist constituency.<sup>42</sup>

The main vulnerability of all three regimes was that they were starting to 'overproduce' elites relative to the co-optative economic capacity of the state to absorb: new generations were fingered as the main possible threat to stability as the era of 'political full employment' came to an end. Although political Islam was starting to express the protest of the lumpenproletariat, it remained marginalised. Morocco, whose large impoverished masses were becoming more socially mobilised, was seen as the most vulnerable of the regimes and Tunisia as the least.

### **NeoLiberal Globalisation and Authoritarian Upgrading (1990-2011)**

In this period neoliberal globalisation<sup>43</sup> came to NA as the old populist social contract and state developmental formulas gave way to 'post-populism.'<sup>44</sup> Several converging factors drove this change. All NA regimes suffered foreign exchange crises and debt attendant on the late 1980s-1990s depression in oil prices, and became more vulnerable to IMF and creditor pressures for austerity-driven 'structural adjustment.' Neoliberalism was promoted by cabinets of technocrats or businessmen more attuned to the demands of IFI than those of their peoples. A parallel economic

---

<sup>42</sup> John Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: the Political Economy of Two Regimes* (Princeton University Press, 1983); Raymond Hinnebusch, *Egyptian Politics Under Sadat: The Post-Populist Transformation of an Authoritarian-Modernizing State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>43</sup> Laura Guazzone and Daniela Pioppi (eds.), *The Arab State and Neo-Liberal Globalization* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2009).

<sup>44</sup> Raymond Hinnebusch, 'Liberalization without Democratization in 'Post-populist' Authoritarian States: Evidence from Syria and Egypt,' in Nils Butenschon, Uri Davis and Manel Hassassian (eds.), *Citizenship and the State in the Middle East*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 123- 45.



opening (*infatih*) led to unequal competition from Western exporters, driving national industries under, while tax breaks were accorded to foreign companies. Labour rights were removed, and welfare provision was delegated to private networks linked to the regime or to Islamists. Iconic of the shift in regimes' social bases was the partial reversal of land reform in Tunisia and Egypt that allowed the restoration of the rural oligarchy at the expense of the peasantry initially favoured by populist regimes. As regimes abandoned efforts to politically incorporate their populations, they faced rising Islamist and anti-Western opposition.<sup>45</sup> As such, authoritarian power was retained albeit now to protect new inequalities on behalf of the bourgeoisie and against the mass public.

Analysts asked how regimes could initiate economic liberalisation that potentially weakened state control over the economy and also antagonised their original popular constituencies while remaining in control and even politically liberalising. King<sup>46</sup> argued that the authoritarian survival formula amounted to a cultivation of new constituencies to substitute for those being abandoned: the privatisation of public sectors provided patronage to co-opt rent-seeking supportive crony bourgeoisies. Heydemann<sup>47</sup> argued that economic liberalisation replaced public with private monopolies; rather than generating an independent bourgeoisie able to check the state, privatisation created a rent-seeking state-dependent bourgeoisie that supported authoritarianism. By comparison to such concentrated entrenched interests supportive of regimes, the collective action problem deterred the mobilisation of the lower strata to contest the upward redistribution of wealth that neo-liberal policies promoted. Finally, regimes became dependent on Western powers to provide

---

<sup>45</sup> Remy Leveau, *Le Sabre et le Turban: L'Avenir du Maghreb* (Paris: Francois Bourin, 1993).

<sup>46</sup> Stephen King, *The New Authoritarianism in the Middle East and North Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009).

<sup>47</sup> Steven Heydemann, *Networks of Privilege in the Middle East: the Politics of Economic Reform Revisited* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

financial or security support used to co-opt or control opposition, all legitimised after 2011 by the ‘war on terror’—which however, tended to further radicalise some opposition elements.<sup>48</sup>

In parallel, regimes found ways to ‘upgrade’ and adapt authoritarian rule in an age of democratisation. ‘Lop-sided’ limited political liberalisation favoured those who supported neoliberal policies.<sup>49</sup> Pluralisation of party systems permitted the emergence of competing opposition parties, facilitating the co-optation and division of the opposition, while various electoral manipulations and bureaucratic restrictions prevented them from mobilising mass constituencies.<sup>50</sup> Gerrymandering of electoral systems fostered neoliberal parties incorporating the regimes’ new crony capitalist constituencies.<sup>51</sup> The republics’ original corporatist ruling parties situated themselves between the conservative and radical opposition parties, but they and their corporatist organisations, such as workers’ unions, that had mobilised the masses in the populist era (against the colonizer or old oligarchy) now functioned to keep them demobilised.<sup>52</sup> Able to stand above and balance between winners and losers, presidents and kings become more autonomous of their former party/bureaucratic/popular bases, while ruling families, going into business, were aggrandized; yet, reneging on the former social contract, they suffered legitimacy losses and had to rely more on divide and rule and on coercion.

In Tunisia, neoliberalism followed an incremental path. The trade union federation initially effectively resisted moves against worker interests with protests and strikes, hence reforms had to be agreed via a tripartite state-business-union corporatism. However, this changed when debt led to

---

<sup>48</sup> Lise Storm, ‘The persistence of authoritarianism as a source of radicalization in North Africa,’ *International Affairs* 85, 5 (2009): 997-1013.

<sup>49</sup> Raymond Hinnebusch, ‘Liberalization without Democratization,’ cit.

<sup>50</sup> Jean Leca, ‘Opposition in the Middle East and North Africa’ *Government and Opposition* 32 (1997): 557–577; Ellen Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 126-152.

<sup>51</sup> Louis Bradley Glasser, *Economic Development and Political Reform: The Impact of External Capital on the Middle East* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2001).

<sup>52</sup> King, *The New Authoritarianism* cit.

negative growth and an IMF structural adjustment program in the 1980s; union leaders were arrested and purged and loyalists appointed. Under Ben Ali, who brought in technocrats, neoliberalism deepened. The new union leadership agreed to Ben Ali's economic policies, claiming workers had to adapt to economic globalisation and there were few strikes even though worker gains were eroded.

Political developments were shaped by this political economy context. The Ben Ali era started with political liberalization, under a national pact in which the ruling party was to forfeit its privileged position; however the Islamist Al-Nahda movement grew, posing as the new champion of those being marginalised. Unable to co-opt the opposition, Ben Ali banned Al-Nahda, and initiated controlled elections in which the ruling Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD) always won big majorities. The contraction of political and press freedoms put Tunisia among the more authoritarian of the Arab states despite its relatively high socio-economic indicators.<sup>53</sup>

Privatisation took an increasingly crony capitalist form, with the president's and his wife's relatives the biggest business operators. Typically, state banks gave unsecured loans to insiders to buy up state assets, who laid off workers, sometimes sold the machinery, and neglected to repay the loans. Also an agrarian counter-revolution transferred 600,000 ha. to a rural elite and privatised peasant cooperatives, all with support from a World Bank loan. Joining of the Euro-Med partnership forced tariff cuts and bankruptcies on local manufacturers. By 2007, the private sector dominated and the IMF gave Tunisia star marks. The growth rate was 5per cent in 1982-86, and 3.5per cent in 1992-96 but, owing to unequal distribution, the standard of living of the masses still fell. Nonetheless, Tunisia retained more of a social safety net and investment in health and education than other NA states; and to keep social peace, firms had to make contributions to

---

<sup>53</sup> Emma Murphy, *Economic and Political Change in Tunisia: From Bourguiba to Ben Ali* (London: Macmillan, 1999); Rikke Haugbolle and Francesco Cavatorta, 'Will the real Tunisian opposition please stand up? Opposition coordination failures under authoritarian constraints,' *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 38, 3 (2011): 323-341.

national insurance, which deterred investors who had to operate in a neoliberal global market wherein labour costs must be driven down.<sup>54</sup>

A similar economic tangent was evident in Morocco. In the late 1970s, the country had suffered a sharp drop in export earnings from phosphates while oil import costs had risen. Soaring debt and later slashes in Saudi aid forced structural adjustment involving public spending and subsidy cuts that led to bread riots in 1984. While the riots delayed austerity, by the 1990s Morocco was a model of budgetary discipline. Privatisation of the public sector concentrated its assets in the hands of the royal family and a handful of cronies or foreign firms. Public employment, wages and the HDI all fell while the percentage in poverty rose from 13 per cent in 1990-1 to 25 per cent in 2005.<sup>55</sup> Since, under these circumstances, urbanization was increasing the dangers of protest, private and foreign aid funds were channelled into charities under royal control. At the same time, to organise a constituency among the beneficiaries of neoliberalism, the regime created a new centre-right party, the Constitutional Union, representative of the higher bourgeoisie and championing militant neoliberalism; the regime used gerrymandering, fraud and rural notables to deliver the votes to put it in power.

With the regime weakening in the early 1990s, as the king lost legitimacy for his stand with the West in the Gulf war and royal succession imminent, the *makhzen* placated the opposition with increased freedom of the press and civil society, reductions in repression and fairer elections. This allowed the populist Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires (USFP,) which had opposed structural adjustment, to win an electoral plurality and form the government under Abdul Salam Yussufi, the first time the opposition had taken power after an election; yet this seeming watershed in

---

<sup>54</sup> Larbi Sadiki, 'The clay 'tiger': Tunisia and the end of the 'bread' economic model,' *IPRIS Maghreb Bulletin* (2011); Jean-Pierre Cassarino, 'Participatory development and liberal reforms in Tunisia: the gradual incorporation of some economic networks,' in Heydemann (ed.), *Networks of Privilege*, 223-242.

<sup>55</sup> Myriam Catusse, 'Morocco's Political Economy: Ambiguous Privatization and the Emerging Social Question' in Guazzone and Pioppi (eds.), *The Arab State and Neo-Liberal Globalization*, 185-216.

democratic accountability was diluted by the royal-appointed upper house and the king's veto over policy from his power to dismiss the government. As its co-optation by the regime cost the USFP popular support, the opposition's rise to government turned out to be a variation on classic divide and rule.<sup>56</sup>

In 1999, the new King, Muhammad VI, came to power, promising political reform but by 2003 his opening was reversed as the civil war in Algeria, 9/11, and terrorist incidents in Morocco legitimised a 'war on terror' against Islamic militancy that extended to all dissent deemed threatening. Indeed, the very moderation of the mainstream Islamic movements, increasing their appeal, and their attempts to create a secular-Islamist coalition to pressure the monarchy into democratisation, made them special targets of repression.<sup>57</sup> From 2003-2011, power flowed away from politicians and political institutions to a newly empowered monarchy and technocrats attuned to the demands of IFIs.

Egypt's post-populist political development was also marked by cycles of opening, when the regime had sufficient rent to sustain patronage, and closing, when opposition mounted, often associated with deepening neoliberalism or unpopular foreign policy moves.<sup>58</sup> Egypt's regime had cracked down in the late Sadat period on mounting opposition, notably to peace with Israel, but re-liberalised politically in the early Mubarak period when enough rent was accumulated to resist external neoliberal pressures. The ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) positioned itself between populism, represented by the left-wing NPUP, and neo-liberalism advocated by the Wafd,

---

<sup>56</sup> Remy Leveau, 'The Moroccan Monarchy: A Political System in Quest of a New Equilibrium' in Joseph Kositner, (ed.), *Middle East Monarchies: The Challenge of Modernity* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000): 117-30; Michael Willis, 'Morocco's Islamists and the Legislative Elections of 2002: The Strange Case of the Party that did not Want to Win', *Mediterranean Politics*, 9, 1 (2004): 53-81; Francesco Cavatorta, 'Divided they stand, divided they fail': opposition politics in Morocco,' *Democratization* 16,1 (2009): 137-156.

<sup>57</sup> Francesco Cavatorta, 'Civil society, Islamism and democratisation: the case of Morocco,' *Journal of Modern African Studies* 44, 2 (2006): 203-222.

<sup>58</sup> Glasser, *Economic Development and Political Reform* cit., 50-54.

representative of the *infitah* bourgeoisie with ties to Western capital. However, the oil price collapse of the late 1980s, debt and IMF pressures put harder reforms, notably privatisation of the public sector, on the agenda. For its anti-Saddam stand in the 1990 Gulf war, Western donors accorded Cairo a big windfall in debt relief in exchange for deepening of economic 'reform.' Having previously referred to the IMF as a 'quack doctor,' Mubarak now claimed that under globalisation there was no alternative to its demands. The regime fostered a supportive coalition: business organisations were well organised and got increasing political access thru parliament, while the NDP lurched to the right. The Wafd was co-opted, allowed 15per cent of the vote and 58 parliamentary seats, while the Ikhwan (Muslim Brotherhood), representative of Gulf capital, was allowed to join the Wafd's lists. All shared support for neo-liberalism, privatization of the public sector, and revision of land tenancy laws to favour owners. The parties of the left, Hizb al-'Amal and the NPUP, were prevented from forming a joint list and from actively campaigning among the mass public. However, in parallel with neoliberalisation, the regime faced throughout the 1990s an increasingly violent Islamist Uprising; and, instead of strengthening the moderate Ikhwan in order to isolate the radicals, the regime turned against and repressed the Ikhwan, thus contracting the political opening.

In the 2000s, the NDP moved even further right as it increasingly co-opted the emerging business class. Businessmen and Western educated neoliberal oriented technocrats encouraged by Gamal Mubarak took over the government under the 2004 ministry of Ahmad al-Nazif. Under it, privatization involved selling public assets at below market prices to a small group of crony capitalist bureaucrats and investors. Lucrative franchises on foreign firms were also acquired by crony capitalists. In parallel, a new labour law, no. 12 of 2003, increased the right of employers to dismiss workers and a new tax law shifted the burden from the rich to the middle class, with the rate levied on the superrich cut to 10per cent. The 1990s reversal of Nasser's tenancy laws led to expulsions of peasants from the land, protests and repression by police and landlord thugs; by the

end of 1990s, 7per cent of the population owned 60per cent of the land. This was paralleled in foreign policy by growing ties, including business relations, with Israel.

How were the masses controlled and opposition marginalised? World Bank and other funders provided funds to pay off those dismissed from public employment in the transition period. Much of the politically conscious urban population did not vote while the ruling party distributed patronage in elections, rural notables delivered their clients and businessmen trucked their workers to the polls. The labour union leadership was co-opted, endorsing the 1991 privatisation law and containing pressures for strikes while the government repressed independent unions; yet, from the mid-2000s, Egypt experienced the longest wave of worker protests and strikes since WW II. On and off repression continued as emergency law was replaced by counter-terrorism law.

The neoliberal NDP government and perceived plans for Mubarak to pass power to his son, neoliberal icon, Gamal Mubarak, provoked the *kefaya* demonstrations calling for Mubarak to go; this, combined with US democracy pressures, led to the relatively free 2005 parliamentary election in which the MB emerged as the main opposition, with 88 seats and 20per cent of the vote; as, however, US pressures receded, political liberalisation was again reversed, with the Brotherhood facing new repression. One of the factors that helped spark the Uprising against Mubarak was the 2010 election, when the regime engineered the virtual expulsion of the opposition from parliament.

The regime's zig-zag, combining selective relaxation of control over the political arena—e.g. greater freedom of the press and opposition access to parliament—with subsequent re-tightening and closing of access, turned limited political pluralisation into a source of frustration rather than a safely value as intended.

## **The Arab Uprising (2010--)**

The underlying causes of the Arab Uprising, a combination of neoliberal economics and neo-patrimonial regimes, were relatively uniformly present across North Africa. The Uprising also took the quite similar-and unprecedented-form of large scale peaceful mass protest against incumbent regimes, indicative of similar high levels of social mobilisation (e.g. education, middle class formation) across the region.<sup>59</sup> Notwithstanding this, NA regimes sharply diverged, with Tunisia and Egypt experiencing leadership change and state weakening while Morocco seemingly escaped this.<sup>60</sup> Do their state formation tangents help explain these variations in the extent of change? Do they equip NA states for a post-Uprising transition to stable democracy or make for more authoritarian continuity than change?

### *Regime Change or Adaptation*

Why has Morocco's monarchy proved more resilient, in spite of the fact that analysts long saw it as more, not less, vulnerable because of its disinterest in development and social reform? Moreover, the neoliberalism that helped provoke the Arab uprising had actually been more damaging in Morocco than in the republics: its starting point was a more unequal society that only got more unequal. By contrast, the pre-neoliberal developmental heritage in the republics left behind better scores on indicators such as growth, equality, poverty reduction and education (Table 1). Ironically, Tunisia, where the Uprising began, had the lowest poverty rate in the region, higher education, literacy rates, life expectancy, and per capita income compared to Egypt and Morocco, combined with respectable growth rates of 5per cent per year.

---

<sup>59</sup> George Joffé, 'The Arab Spring in North Africa: origins and prospects,' *The Journal of North African Studies*, 16, 4 (2011): 507-532; Lisa Anderson, 'Demystifying the Arab Spring: Parsing the Differences between Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya,' *Foreign Affairs*, 2 May-June (2011): 2-7.

<sup>60</sup> Ricardo Laremont (ed.), *Revolution, Revolt and Reform in North Africa: The Arab Spring and Beyond* (London: Routledge, 2013).



## **INSERT TABLE 1 HERE (from pg 36)**

The enduring legitimacy of the centuries-old Moroccan dynasty compared to that of republican presidents was crucial. The republics' legitimacy relied on some combination of nationalism and development performance. But Egypt's regime squandered the nationalist legitimacy of Nasser, its founding president, especially under Mubarak whose collaboration with Israel and dependence on the US, paralleled by the self-enrichment of the presidential family, was particularly delegitimising.<sup>61</sup> The enrichment of the presidential family was similar in Tunisia. The aggrandizement of the Moroccan monarch and his close cronies was no less egregious, yet the king retained hegemony over society, especially the poor; owning big chunks of the economy he was, according to LeVine,<sup>62</sup> enabled to both profiteer at the expense of the poor and provide them with charity. Kings, responsible to God, are perhaps expected to aggrandize themselves while the legitimacy of republican presidents, responsible to the 'People,' is debilitated by the same process. In addition, while presidents cannot easily avoid responsibility for policies, kings are better able to distance themselves, however much they have the last word, from the policies of their governments and to deflect public anger onto those incumbents, who can be rotated as a way of appeasing discontent. While Morocco's system diffused responsibility away from the king, in Tunisia and Egypt the concentration of power and patronage in the presidential families concentrated responsibility.

A second factor was the deeper and more authentic political pluralisation in Morocco *combined with* a lower level of social mobilisation compared to the republics. Morocco's limiting of education

---

<sup>61</sup> Mark Sedgwick, 'Measuring Egyptian Regime Legitimacy,' *Middle East Critique*, 19, 3 (2010): 251-67.

<sup>62</sup> Mark LeVine, 'In the Arab world's deepest state the revolution continues,' *Al-Jazeera*, 20/2/2013 <http://m.aljazeera.com/story/20132209305838184> (accessed 15/9/2014).

also limited employment absorption pressures while the preservation of patriarchal society contained political demands. By contrast, Tunisia combined, of the three states, the most educated and socially mobilised population, which, however, could not be sufficiently absorbed into jobs, with the least open political system, where the Islamists and secular opposition were thoroughly excluded from the political arena, the press least free, and NGOs most controlled. Egypt was more open than Tunisia and less than Morocco, with its limited pluralisation periodically reversed and nearly shut down just prior to the Uprising. Morocco's system afforded more effective mechanisms for co-optation of the political opposition, which was largely excluded in Tunisia or frustrated by the regime's cat and mouse games in Egypt.

Third, the republics were less advantageously positioned to manage Islamic-secular cleavages than Morocco's monarchy. Ironically, in the secular Egyptian and Tunisian regime political Islamists were both alienated and marginalised in the short run. Yet they were actually relatively empowered in the longer run: regimes' repression tended to disproportionately weaken secular forces whose associations and access to the public could be more easily contained compared to Islamists who enjoyed the advantage of mosques and religious networks relatively more immune to state control. The privatisation of state welfare functions inadvertently positioned Islamists to move into the vacuum where the post-populist republics withdrew from welfare provision. The republics, especially Tunisia, passed up the opportunity to effectively co-opt moderate Islamists in order to marginalise the militants. Many secular opposition parties, such as the Egyptian NPUP, saw the Islamists as a greater threat than the regime, allowing them to be co-opted and neutered by the latter, thereby losing their popular bases; as such, the spearhead of opposition passed to younger generation of activists, among whom secularists and Islamists united in the protests that brought down Mubarak.

In Morocco, by contrast, the King's religious legitimacy made it harder for Islamists movements to challenge the regime and easier for him to split them and co-opt the moderates among them: thus,

he was able to diffuse pressure for regime change after 2011, most notably by co-opting the moderate Justice and Development Party (PJD) Islamists, and allowing it to form a government after it gained a plurality in elections, while the rival anti-monarchist Justice and Charity Islamists founded by Abdesslam Yassine remained in (peaceful) opposition and Salafist, a third grouping, remained opposed to the latter two. The regime also exploited the Islam-secular divide to abort a democratic coalition against the monarchy. Ironically, secularists supported the religious legitimacy of the king as a bulwark against Islamists; in turn, many Islamists saw themselves closer to the king than to secularists. Some secularists wanted Islamists excluded from politics because, being cut off from mass culture, they could not compete with the Islamist's ability to use mosques and charity to reach the people. Many Westernised women felt threatened by the Islamists but the King, immune to Islamist criticism, promoted and protected their rights, giving them a stake in the regime.<sup>63</sup> Thus, the many cultural conflicts in Morocco's political space continued to prevent the opposition coalition needed to pressure the palace into thorough democratisation.

Finally, how regimes responded to the Uprising mattered, with repression proving quite counterproductive in the two republics and increasing the scope of anti-regime mobilisation to the point where regime cohesion, hence its capacity to repress, broke down.<sup>64</sup> Decisive was the unwillingness of the Egyptian and Tunisian armies to repress the protests in defence of the president. In Egypt the highly developed *mukhabarat* had successfully contained protest for decades; yet resentment against police corruption and brutality and experience of street protest built up over many years, and, combined with internet organising, led to a watershed massive mobilisation that overwhelmed the police; once the army proved unwilling to step in and fire on

---

<sup>63</sup> Julie Pruzan-Jorgensen, 'Analysing Authoritarian Regime Legitimation: Findings from Morocco,' *Middle East Critique* 19, 3 (2010): 269-286.

<sup>64</sup> Frederic Volpi, 'Explaining (and re-explaining) political change in the Middle East during the Arab Spring: trajectories of democratization and of authoritarianism in the Maghreb,' *Democratization* 20, 6 (2013): 969-990.

massed civilians, the regime's coercive capacity was spent.<sup>65</sup> In Tunisia also, the small army was unwilling to fire on protestors while the combined mobilisational role of the trade unions and middle class activists was accelerated by police brutality. Morocco also experienced demonstrations by the February 20<sup>th</sup> movement that briefly combined Islamist and secular elements demanding a constitutional monarchy. Being better situated to make political concessions, the King responded with less repression and a more credible power sharing initiative that allowed him to divide his opponents while stopping well short of democratisation. Protests of 100,000 youth activists were contained by the royalist loyalty of the illiterate rural masses and the newly co-opted established parties, an outcome very different from that in the republics.<sup>66</sup>

### *Between Democratisation and Authoritarian Persistence*

It is one thing to overthrow incumbent presidents and quite another to make the transition to democracy. However, Morocco, Egypt and Tunisia have relative advantages in making a transition compared to other Arab states. Unlike the Mashreq states, ethnic and sectarian cleavages are not insurmountable obstacles since the three NA states enjoy relative homogeneity, long histories of statehood and relative incorporation of minorities, whether Berbers in Morocco or Copts in Egypt. Governing largely de-tribalised societies and without huge amounts of rent, they cannot clientalise and co-opt tribal society to marginalise participatory pressures in the way possible in the GCC regimes. Tunisia in particular, with its larger middle class, mass literacy, secular tradition and moderate Islamist movement was widely seen as having the best prospects for democratic consolidation. In all three states, Islamist movements, with large constituencies embraced the

---

<sup>65</sup> Mona Ghobashy, 'The Praxis of the Egyptian Revolution,' *Middle East Report*, 258, 2011 [www.merip.org/mer/mer258/praxis-egyptian-revolution](http://www.merip.org/mer/mer258/praxis-egyptian-revolution) (accessed 15/9/2014).

<sup>66</sup> Irene Fernández Molina, 'The Monarchy vs. the 20 February Movement: Who Holds the Reins of Political Change in Morocco?' *Mediterranean Politics* 16, 3 (2011): 435-441.

democratic political process and were the initial winners in post-Uprising elections. Yet, at the same time, the enduring power of the 'deep state' and the enduring intractability of inherited problems meant the extent of democratic change remained constrained.<sup>67</sup>

In Morocco, democratisation depended on whether the king was willing to concede enough real power-sharing to increase incorporative capacity. He did concede constitutional changes requiring that he appoint the government from the party that achieved a plurality in elections; yet he could still dismiss the Prime Minister, dissolve parliament and he also retained control over the armed forces, security and foreign policy. This limited change was enough to revitalise political parties that had been marginalised by neoliberal technocrats.<sup>68</sup> The moderate Islamist JDP won a plurality on the basis of promises to attack the corrupt crony capitalism around the *makhzen* and formed a coalition government with the Istiqlal party and two smaller parties, around a platform of a 'third way between revolution and authoritarianism.' However, once the threat of the Uprising passed, especially as secular-Islamist tensions split the youth movement, the king moved to block the PJD's investigations into his cronies. His constitutional concessions were yet another variant on the monarchy's tested techniques of diffusing and absorbing popular discontent rather than a serious movement toward a constitutional democracy. It worked because of the monarchy's continued prestige among what is the most illiterate and patriarchal of North African societies.<sup>69</sup> In Morocco, the monarch continued to possess the hegemony to define and manipulate the rules of the game.

---

<sup>67</sup> George Joffé, 'The Arab Spring in North Africa: origins and prospects,' cit.; Jeffrey Haynes, 'Arab Uprising, Islamists and Democratization,' *Mediterranean Politics*, 18, 2 (2013):170-188.

<sup>68</sup> Atul Razdan, 'Arab Awakening: Morocco's Genteel Arab Spring,' *Diplomatist*, 2012, [http://www.diplomatist.com/dipo10th2012/story\\_017.htm](http://www.diplomatist.com/dipo10th2012/story_017.htm) (accessed 5/3/2013).

<sup>69</sup> Maati Monjib, 'All the King's Islamists,' *Sada*, 20/9/2012 <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/09/20/all-king-s-islamists/e289> (accessed 15/9/2014); Muhammed Jalid, 'The Rise of Populists in Moroccan Politics,' *Sada*, 29/11/2012, <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2012/11/29/rise-of-populists-in-moroccan-politics/e00c> (accessed 15/9/2014).

By contrast, in the republics, the removal of entrenched presidential monarchies exposed sharper and less manageable societal divisions. First, a three-way division opened up between state establishments, secular opposition, and Islamic forces. The main initial outcome of regime collapse in Egypt and Tunisia was the empowerment of Islamists, alarming secularists and liberals; the Islamist victories in the first post-democracy elections were, however, partly a result of the dissolution of ruling parties and the disorganisation of the secular opposition and revolutionary youth; in Egypt, the presidential election in which the old regime candidate was barely edged by his Islamist rival, Muhammad Mursi, better reflected the actual distribution of social power. But this was not reflected inside political institutions dominated by Islamists; and the MB, finding that winning an electoral mandate did not give real authority over the bureaucratic 'deep state' was unwilling to more widely share power. This precipitated an alignment of the secularists and youth with the remnants (*falool*) of the old regime to subsequently shift the power balance away from the Islamists.

Second, in these struggles, the rules of the game, notably constitutional provisions regulating political competition became themselves the objects of contestation. Particularly in Egypt, adherence to democratic rules by all three camps was contingent on the effect on their power positions. Unelected bodies such as the military and judiciary acted in a highly partisan way while Islamist dominated assemblies pushed through provisions alienating secularists. Both Islamists and liberals competed to get the military on their side against the other, with the MB striking a power-sharing deal that left the military autonomous of civilian oversight and entrenched as a powerful economic actor.

In the absence of institutionalized rules of the game, praetorianism was unleashed, again particularly in Egypt, with the struggle for power taking place not just through elections but also via street protest and violence, strikes, repression, and intrigue to win over the military and external funders. The weakened state was less capable of restoring order at a time when mobilisation

exceeded institutionalisation but in Egypt the split between secular and Islamist civil/political society restored a certain capacity for the army-led 'deep state' to balance between them and position itself as the guardian of order appealing to a population tired of constant turmoil in a way similar to the role of the *makhzen* in Morocco.

However, despite somewhat similar Islamist-secular splits, the trajectories of the two republics also diverged, reflective of their earlier state formation differences. In Egypt, deepened praetorianism sharply reversed democratisation. The convergence of mass street protests with the military coup of 30 June 2013 to depose the elected president restored the power of the deep state: in deposing the elected Islamist president, using violence against Mursi's supporters and outlawing the MB as a terrorist organization, the military and the deep state, with the complicity of secularists and revolutionary youth, in effect made a transition to democracy impossible. No democracy that excludes one of the most important socio-political forces in Egypt can be consolidated. Only a regime retaining extra-constitutional powers for the security forces can possibly marginalise the Islamists and cope with the violent spill-over of their resistance to repression. The result appears to be a hybrid regime, Bonapartist, but with pluralistic appendages and restoring the army to the central role it assumed in Egypt's state-building after the 1952 revolution.

In Tunisia, on the other hand, a precarious democratic transition remained on track, despite problems similar to Egypt's. The Islamist Al-Nahda won a plurality in the first post-Uprising elections, owing to its unique name recognition, lack of complicity in the Ben Ali regime, grassroots organising capacity, higher penetration of rural areas compared to city-centric secularists, and a moderate Islamic message attuned to Tunisia's political culture.<sup>70</sup> Unlike the Egyptian Ikhwan, however, Al-Nahda shared power with two secular parties, and a secularist politician became president alongside an Islamist Prime Minister. To be sure, once in power the Nahda party

---

<sup>70</sup> Erik Churchill, 'Tunisia's Electoral Lesson: the Importance of Campaign Strategy,' *Sada*, 27/10/2011, [http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/index.cfm?fa=show&article=45841&solr\\_hilite=](http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/index.cfm?fa=show&article=45841&solr_hilite=) (accessed 15/9/2014).

sought to ban members of the two-million member former ruling Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) from participating in politics, a move that would weaken secularists and liberals some of whom were associated with the old regime at various points and prevent them joining in a counter-coalition which, polls showed, could have mounted a major challenge to Al-Nahda. Former regime party members were behind growing protests against the government; the trade union movement called a general strike and faced attack by the Islamist militia, the League for Protection of the Revolution. Militant Salafists' attempts to restrict cultural expression they considered anti-Islamic seemed tolerated by the government. The acrimonious discourse and the murders of secular political leaders critical of the Al-Nahda government plunged the country into crisis in 2013 similar to what was, in parallel, happening in Egypt. The main difference was that the unpoliticised Tunisian military lacked the ambition to use the crisis to assert dominance; indeed, because there was no 'man on horseback' in the small politically unambitious military that rival political forces could call upon to 'rescue' the country from the other, they needed to compromise their differences through dialogue.<sup>71</sup> In brokering a compromise, the powerful trade union federation played a role similar to the monarchy and army as arbiter; this reflected its historically pivotal role going back to the independence struggle.<sup>72</sup>

Whatever the variations in political practices among the three states, a deeper obstacle to democratic consolidation in all of them is that democratic procedures by themselves are unlikely to deliver solutions to problems rooted in a political economy where globalised neoliberalism dominates. This is particularly likely to disillusion those who backed political change in order to redress the wealth mal-distribution under neoliberal crony capitalism. Revolution has so far

---

<sup>71</sup> For a thorough analysis of Tunisia's prospects, see Emma Murphy, 'The Tunisian uprising and the precarious path to democracy,' *Mediterranean Politics* 16, 2 (2011): 299-305.

<sup>72</sup> Mohamed-Salah Omri, 'Trade unions and the construction of a specifically Tunisian protest configuration,' 24/9/2013, *OpenDemocracy*, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/mohamed-salah-omri/trade-unions-and-construction-of-specifically-tunisian-protest-configuration> (accessed 15/9/2014).



remained purely political, with no attempts to attack unjust economic inequalities; at the same time, it actually worsened economic growth, hence prospects for addressing unemployment, by deterring investors and tourism. What has changed for the unemployed is increased political freedom to express their frustrations. Nor are elected governments necessarily better able to manage deep-rooted economic crises: while they might enjoy greater legitimacy to take hard economic decisions—although there is so far no sign of this—they will also be caught between the need to favour investors and to deliver material benefits to voting constituents; hence they may prove less able to manage the economy than the old regimes. Nor will elected governments, facing the deep state, be likely to promote thorough reform of past abuses; thus, in Morocco limited democratisation was not enough to break down the regime's unwillingness to countenance attacks on crony capitalism and in post-Mursi Egypt Mubarak's crony capitalists were rehabilitated. Moreover, the fragmentation of political parties, with often indistinguishable socio-economic programs, will make governance and the capacity of voters to hold governments to account difficult, especially as many of the big issues, notably wealth distribution, will remain excluded from the political agenda by neo-liberal measures pushed by IFIs on vulnerable economies; as in the West, all parties will follow similar economic policies, hollowing out democracy and discouraging participation. Elections will therefore likely turn on cultural and identity issues framed in de-stabilising zero-sum terms.

Finally, irreversible dependence on the West will continue to be a legitimacy liability in MENA as many of the grievances that motivated the uprising can be traced back to Western pressures for neo-liberalism and policies toward the region. If elected governments are unable to assert any more independence than their authoritarian predecessors, the new regimes will be deprived of one key-ingredient crucial to democratic consolidation elsewhere, nationalist legitimacy.

## **Conclusion**

The North African experience allows us to assess the agent-structure debate regarding the extent to which path dependency closes off possibilities for agency. First, it suggests that the deep political economy infrastructure shapes developments at the institutional and leadership level. Thus, in the age of statist modernisation (coterminous with bi-polarity and Keynesian mixed economies globally), populist authoritarianism dominated the region. In the republics, charismatic ideological leadership governed through single-party institutions and corporatism led by the 'new middle class' and including peasants and workers. In this period, traditional monarchy, eschewing state-led development, was on the defensive. Later, rent from the 1970s oil boom drove parallel institutional expansion and clientelism, with charismatic authority routinised in neo-patrimonial institutions; conversely, the oil bust opened the door to neoliberalism. The movement toward US hegemony and neo-globalisation, driving neoliberalism at the regional level, was reflected in a post-populist authoritarian reconfiguration of state-society relations giving privileged access to new bourgeoisies and excluding populist constituencies. Neo-liberalism uniformly fostered crony capitalism regardless of regime type, pushing a convergence toward deepened patrimonialization of leadership in all three NA states.

Yet, persisting variations in state formation paths help explain the variations in continuity and change accompanying the Arab Uprising in the three states. The much lesser extent of change in royal Morocco as compared to republican Tunisia and Egypt can be explained by several factors. First, as modernisation theory argued, the increased social mobilisation accompanying modernisation must be matched by higher levels of economic development and political incorporation if regimes are not to face destabilisation. As regards economic development, the very virtues of the modernising republics, notably greater investment in education, exacerbated their crisis of job creation. As regards political incorporation, the Moroccan monarchy incrementally increased its techniques of co-optation to match delayed social mobilisation; the Tunisian and Egyptian regimes did the opposite, propelling modernisation at a greater rate than political incorporation. Additionally, where neo-patrimonial leadership dominates, traditional monarchs are

more ‘naturally’ legitimate: while presidents’ legitimacy depended on nationalist or socio-economic achievements, which they did not sufficiently deliver, the traditional legitimacy of Morocco’s monarchy was impervious to its socio-economic under-performance. Finally, while the monarchy exploited inherited secular-Islamic divisions, the republics’ attempts to marginalise Islam only generated a permanent opposition-in-waiting.

Such persisting structural differences made for key differences in agency: the lesser mobilisation and more moderate demands of protestors in Morocco reflected the divided, co-opted political arena structured by the monarchy over decades; while the more thorough and radical mobilisations in Tunisia and Egypt reflected the imbalance between social mobilisation and political inclusion. This variation in agency—mass mobilisation—profoundly mattered for the differences between regime survival in Morocco and removal in Egypt and Tunisia; so also did the choices of the military commanders not to defend presidents in the republics, a function of the greater de-legitimation of presidential monarchs. The agency of democratic movements to go beyond regime leadership change toward democratic transition also varied according to inherited structure; thus, democratisation made more headway in Tunisia because it was more compatible with this structure, such as the historic centrality of trade union power, and less so in Egypt where it was obstructed by the military-dominated deep state; and in Morocco where the monarch’s semi-pluralistic practices substituted for it.

This points to how state formation trajectories generated enduring structures that make it likely the coming years will bring as much authoritarian continuity as democratic change. First, especially in the republics, the Uprising unleashed levels of political mobilisation that could not readily be absorbed by institutions; the lack of consensus on rules of the game, particularly regarding the roles of the army and religion in politics, set back moves toward democratic consolidation. Second, the Uprising exposed the enduring secular-Islamic cleavage that undermined the shared identity needed

for democratisation. In Egypt the army and in Morocco the king exploited public weariness with disorder and cultural cleavages to limit democratisation.

Political economy analysis identifies a further obstacle to democratisation. The Uprisings were a reaction against the period of neoliberal globalisation in the region, which created both acute social inequalities and enduring dependencies on the Western-centred international financial system. However, the latter locks Middle East states into neoliberal practices and removes the big issues of politics—distribution of wealth—from domestic political agendas; doses of authoritarian power, as well as divide and rule, will likely be needed to turn back demands for social justice that cannot be accommodated in a neo-liberal order.

As inherited structure closes in on the agency unleashed by the Uprisings, the most likely outcome in all three states is hybrid regimes, with varying mixes of the authoritarian features of their earlier state formation with the mass mobilising effects of the Uprising. Now politicians must use and manipulate the more mobilised masses in their rivalries, but they must also share power with the ‘deep state’ and are constrained by external dependencies. While such hybridity appears to have greater legitimacy in a monarchy because of its ability to stand ‘above’ politics, in all three states it is congruent with current circumstances.

Table 1: Political Economy Measures, NA States

Per capita

\$PPP (2005)    HDI (2003)    Literacy (2003)

Egypt	5049	65.9	55.6
Morocco	3547	63.1	50.7
Tunisia	6461	73.3	74.3

*Source:* Sami Bibi and Mustafa K. Nabli, *Equity and*

*Inequality in the Arab Region*, Policy Research Report No. 33 (Dokki, Giza: Economic Research Forum, 2010): 8-49

# Constitutions against Revolutions. Political Participation in North Africa

GIANLUCA PAROLIN<sup>73</sup>

*ABSTRACT This article looks into the genesis of Madisonian factions (or Elster's interests) in the constitution-making process. The North African constitutional transitions offer prime insights into the appetites of political forces to appropriate the key decision on how to write the constitution, which ultimately leads to undue advantages in the drafting stage. Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya show different ways of appropriating that moment and the involvement of different forces. These appropriations, however, all involve limitations to political participation, with various degrees as evidenced in the three experiences. If distortions of the constitution-making are deemed inappropriate, then appropriations need to be avoided.*

Revolution and constitutional change have been deliberately associated to instill the belief of a hand-in-glove dynamic between the two. The radical change sought with revolutions, however, has very little chance of being attained in constitutional processes imbued with liberal legality, especially when these come to be controlled by forces pursuing continuity rather than change. North Africa offers a set of examples of how the process of constitutional change can be designed to keep radical forces and ideas away from the drafting table. Drafters in turn made sure to entrench their positions and further sideline the marginalised. Constitutional failure might not be bad news, then, for the revolutionaries.

Continuity in the North African constitutional transitions of the current decade can be detected on various levels, and textual continuity with previous constitutions is only the final

---

<sup>73</sup> Department of Law, The American University in Cairo. Email: gparolin@aucegypt.edu

outcome. There is abundant literature explaining textual continuity; some emphasise the strength and stickiness of constitutional traditions,<sup>74</sup> while others point to the fact that regimes operate within a constitutional framework that is not necessarily authoritarian.<sup>75</sup> In order to trace continuity at its source, however, I suggest to shift our attention away from the text and consider the moment when the critical decision between continuity and change was taken—without hesitation—in favor of the former.

From the North African experiences one can draw a few considerations on the subtle strategies of exclusion that liberal constitutionalism allows, the constraints that a given process places on the possibility of embracing radical change, and the virtues of constitutional failures for the revolutionary project. In this article, I want to offer some background for that, and therefore present a narrative of the transitions in Tunisia and Egypt (and Libya) that focuses exclusively on the dynamics of the capture(s) of the constitution-making process.

### **The Big Bang Moments**

Quite surprisingly, the constitution-making process is a relatively recent area of investigation. Post-1989 transitions triggered the interest of scholars who were weighing in pros and cons of various modes of constitution-making. In 1995, social and political theorist Jon Elster laid the foundations of a theory of forces and mechanisms involved in the constitution-making process, and their impact on it.<sup>76</sup> Elster pursued an interest in the agency of ‘factions’ that can be traced as far back as James Madison in North American literature,<sup>77</sup> but in doing so Elster went further to explore the inner dynamics of the process. Even if Elster’s piece is often referenced as bringing to the fore the paradox of constitution-making as an activity conducted

---

<sup>74</sup> Zachary Elkins, Tom Ginsburg, and James Melton, *The Endurance of National Constitutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>75</sup> Giorgio Lombardi, *Premesse al corso di diritto pubblico comparato. Problemi di metodo* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1986).

<sup>76</sup> Jon Elster, ‘Forces and Mechanisms in the Constitution-Making Process,’ *Duke Law Journal* 45 (1995): 364-96.

<sup>77</sup> See James Madison’s discussion of passions and reasons in ‘The Federalist No. 10,’ *Daily Advertiser* (22/11/1787).

in times of crisis under the least favorable circumstances for meticulous and vigilant design,<sup>78</sup> the author focused more broadly on how individual, group and institutional interests intersect, and are aggregated, transformed and misrepresented in the process.

Elster argues that certain provisions, procedural arrangements and institutional design options can be explained with the involvement of individual, group and institutional interests. He gives as examples of (a) provisions precipitated by individual interests, the ones guaranteeing immunity to former regime figures,<sup>79</sup> as examples of (b) provisions precipitated by group interests, the ones regulating electoral procedures and executive-legislative relations,<sup>80</sup> and as examples of (c) provisions precipitated by institutional interests, the ones giving preponderant importance to one or the other branch of government.<sup>81</sup>

Elster points us to the ways in which interests pervade constitutional choices, but I suggest we move further upstream to identify when these interests come into existence and become relevant: these moments are what I call the Big Bangs of constitution-making—a visual reference of a central episode in the line of murky fluctuations and system inflation. In other words, the Big Bang moment is that central episode in the constitution-making process when Madison's factions and Elster's interests are generated or empowered. The Big Bang moment of factions or interest clusters, I argue, is what generates and empowers such clusters or factions, since their own existence and political weight depend on the creative act that characterises that moment.

The choice of a roadmap for the transition, for instance, is a good example of a Big Bang moment, since it is the generative act that empowers certain factions and interests while sidelining others. Considering the actors involved in the choice of the roadmap and their

---

<sup>78</sup> Mark Tushnet, 'Constitution-Making: An Introduction', *Texas Law Review* 91 (2013): 1993.

<sup>79</sup> As in the case of former regime figures in Bulgaria or Romania. See: Elster, 'Forces and Mechanisms' cit., p. 377.

<sup>80</sup> As in the case of the preference of small Communist or ex-Communist parties in Poland and Czechoslovakia for a PR system in the immediate aftermath of 1989. Ibid., 378.

<sup>81</sup> As in the case of the preponderant role of ordinary legislatures in all the post-1989 Eastern European constitutions. Ibid., 380.



preferences illuminates the genesis of factions and interest clusters and their downstream influence on constitution-making. Scholarship recognises how influential these 'procedural arrangements' can be on ordinary politics, but their effects on the constitution-making are still understudied. Assessments of the transitions in North Africa lacks this perspective, thus failing to appreciate the disengagement and frustration that they have produced, as evidenced in the extraordinarily fast drop in voter turnout figures from 2011 to present.

In this article, I want to focus on one specific aspect of constitutional Big Bangs in North Africa: their capturing. Far from arguing that the sheer capturing produces pre-determined outcomes in favor of those seizing the Big Bang moment (Elster precisely shows how these clusters interact and can produce all sorts of outcomes), I would rather frame the issue in terms of advantages that actors try to secure for themselves in the form of privileged positions in the drafting, control over the selection of drafters, or the timing of elections.

The North African transitions offer prime examples of these dynamics and can function as good case studies for the Big Bang moments of constitution-making. They also show how complex (and messy) Big Bang moments can get.

### **Tunisia's Big Bang phase**

In Tunisia, the departure of Ben Ali in January 2011 signaled the beginning of the transition, but it was not until end of March 2011 that a choice on its roadmap was finalised. Even if the figures actively involved in these two months have no longer been on the frontline of Tunisian politics, their involvement in determining the roadmap and the constitution-making process has had long-lasting effects. The continuous pressure of the street has also significantly steered choices in many occasions.

A simple glimpse at the bios of these Big Bang figures shows how these politicians, administrators, statesmen, or men of the law share a common social background within the

small Tunisian elite, and all partook in the higher administration of the state at the service of the two Tunisian presidents since the independence: Bourguiba and Ben Ali. Continuity here took the form of a class operation, I argue, as the goal of the Tunisian social and political elite was to maintain its control on state institutions while disengaging with the previous regime. The elite negotiated at the same time an honorable way-out for the figures of the old regime within its ranks, and a glorified role for itself in the new configuration of the state against street protests.

On Ben Ali's departure, on 14 January 2011, his Prime Minister, Muhammad al-Ghannushi, attempted to downplay events and provisionally assume the functions of the president based on the assumption of the president's only temporary inability to serve. 69-year-old al-Ghannushi had served as Ben Ali's Prime Minister since 1999, and retained his post even after the government reshuffle that Ben Ali offered to quell the protests in December 2010. Al-Ghannushi's maneuver had constitutional coverage in that art. 56 regulated cases of temporary inability of the president, but required an act of transfer of powers from the latter to his Prime Minister.

On the very next day, 15 January 2011, the procedure provided for in art. 57 (regulating cases of permanent inability of the president) was set in motion. The Constitutional Council gathered and appointed as interim president the Speaker of the Lower House, 77-year-old Fu'ad al-Mubazza', who served until the end of the year (13/12/2011). During his office, two distinct phases of the transition followed; a first phase quite firmly controlled by old regime figures, and a second phase led by figures less implicated with the old regime yet originating from the same elite circles of the Tunisian upper crust.

During the first phase, when al-Ghannushi still served as Prime Minister of a government of national unity (17/1-27/2/2011), the horizon of the transition was the meager promise of general elections within six months. The day after government was formed, al-Ghannushi

resigned from the old regime ruling party (*al-Tajammu' al-Dusturi al-Dimuqrati*, the Democratic Constitutional Rally or RCD, its French acronym), but the operation did not ease street protests. Ten days later, al-Ghannushi purged government of all former RCD members while retaining his post.

Before being forced out of government, al-Ghannushi established the High Commission for Political Reform (*al-Lajna al-'Ulya li-l-Islah al-Siyasi*, HCPR),<sup>82</sup> and appointed Yadh Ben 'Ashour to chair it. Ben 'Ashour, a 65-year-old law professor stemming from one of the most revered families of the elite, had somehow distanced himself from the Ben Ali regime, but had previously served in a variety of state functions, including on the Constitutional Council. Ben 'Ashour selected for the HCPR a number of cronies and colleagues of his, including his brother Rafaa. The selection was highly criticised for its arbitrariness, and for the previous support that members of the team had offered to the Ben Ali regime, in particular for the 2002 amendments to the constitution: amendments that allowed Ben Ali to hold on to power until the uprising.<sup>83</sup>

While the interim government was engaged full-speed in trying to capture the transition and limit the losses for the regime, the opposition mobilised and organised around a number of councils for the protection of the revolution.<sup>84</sup> The most important of these mobilisation efforts was the one spearheaded by the '14 January Front,' a constellation of leftist and nationalist parties whose common political platform was to stand united against the forces of the counter-revolution. In late January, the front organized the first Qasba sit-in, demanded al-

---

<sup>82</sup> See Paul Schraeder and Hamadi Redissi, 'Ben Ali's Fall,' *Journal of Democracy* 22, 3 (2011): 16. Paul Schraeder and Hamadi Redissi consider the establishment of the HCPR and two other fact-finding commissions by the interim government as 'heartening'. I am sure the authors would have advanced a different reading, had they looked at the rationale and internal dynamics of such commissions, in particular the HCPR.

<sup>83</sup> Mounir Ben Aicha (pseudonym), 'Le risque du détournement de la Révolution tunisienne par la future Assemblée Nationale Constituante', in *Nawaat*, 4/4/2011. <http://nawaat.org/portail/2011/04/04/lavenir-de-la-revolution-tunisienne-dans-la-future-assemblee-nationale-constituante/> (accessed 8/4/2014).

<sup>84</sup> An account of the various councils, both at the national and local levels, and their membership can be found in: Houki Chaker, 'Les conseils pour la protection de la révolution,' *L'observatoire tunisien de la transition démocratique* [http://www.aihr-resourcescenter.org/administrator/upload/documents/HOUKICORR\(1\).pdf](http://www.aihr-resourcescenter.org/administrator/upload/documents/HOUKICORR(1).pdf) (accessed 8/4/2014).

Ghannushi's resignation and called for the formation of a Constituent Assembly. On 11 February, members of the front together with other unions, political parties (notably the Islamist Al-Nahda), and NGOs announced the creation of the National Council for the Protection of the Revolution (*al-Majlis al-Watani li-Himayat al-Thawra*), affirmed decision-making powers, and listed among its tasks the control over legislation passed during the transitional period, acts of the interim government, state appointments, membership and jurisdiction of the three commissions created by the interim government, and urgent measures for the judicial and information systems.<sup>85</sup> Claiming oversight powers over the three commissions created by the interim government clearly signaled the dissatisfaction and suspicion that signatories had towards the activities of these commissions, in particular the one on political reform.

The creation of the NCPR posed a serious threat to the interim government, because it could boost a much stronger legitimacy than the regime holdovers' government itself. It should come to no surprise, then, that the interim president (al-Mubazza'), the Prime Minister (al-Ghannushi), and the Chair of the HCPR (Ben 'Ashour) all reacted quite strongly to the announcement of the NCPR.<sup>86</sup> The NCPR sought official endorsement, which was denied by al-Mubazza', but Ben 'Ashour was swifter in smelling the opportunity and hijacked the NCPR move, offering a merger with his own HCPR. The agreement was drafted by Ben 'Ashour's HCPR in the form of an emergency decree (Décret-Loi 6/2011-18/2/2011). In the fine print, the NCPR found that (1) old HCPR members retained a privileged position as the 'Experts' Committee' (art. 3(4)), (2) membership in the council was decided by the chair (Ben 'Ashour, art. 3(3)), (3) deliberations would be secret (art. 7), and (4) voting in the council would be based on the principle: one person one vote (which meant that a large political party and 'a Tunisian personality' both weighed the same, art. 5). The outcome of the merger was called

---

<sup>85</sup> See the six-point declaration signed on 11 February, and the names of the 28 signatories: Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>86</sup> For the details: Ibid., 18-22.

the High Authority for the Realisation of the Objectives of the Revolution, Political Reform, and Democratic Transition (*al-Hay'at al-'Ulya li-Tahqiq Ahdaf al-Thawra wa-l-Islah al-Siyasi wa-l-Intiqal al-Dimuqrati*, or ISROR, its French acronym).

The last days of al-Ghannushi's government were riddled with street protests. The announcement of general elections for mid-July met with tepid reception as the size of street protests kept increasing until al-Ghannushi resigned on 27 February.

Whereas during the first phase, the unfolding of the contest for legitimacy was at the center of the stage, during the second phase what captured it was the definition of the framework for the transition. Defining the roadmap means deciding who will have a say in the constitution-making phase, which ultimately reads as who will be entrenching its position within the new institutional design. In this second phase, a new government was appointed, but key decisions on the transition were still taken within ISROR, under the tight control of Ben 'Ashour.

The new government was chaired by al-Baji Qa'id al-Sabsi, a figure with a very similar profile to that of Ben 'Ashour. Al-Baji Qa'id al-Sabsi, an 84-year-old lawyer stemming from the upper class, was deeply involved in the Bourguiba administration as Interior Minister, Minister of Defense and of Foreign Affairs. When Ben Ali became president, he served as Ambassador to Germany, but later also for a term in parliament (even being the Speaker for a year).

While working on the selection of the members of the ISROR council in early March, Ben 'Ashour had to confront the challenge of those who opposed the merger between the NCPR and the HCPR. Most of the leftist and nationalist parties of the '14 January Front' who were at the forefront of the NCPR, in fact, refused to join the ISROR, and started disputing its legitimacy, but with the heavyweight unions and parties joining in (first and foremost, the UGTT and Al-Nahda) Ben 'Ashour's operation can be considered to have been quite successful. His selection of members, however, was heavily criticised from within. His response was to

progressively increase the number of members, which in three weeks doubled from 71 to 145. As Ben 'Ashour was giving in to various cleavage requests, he was also making sure to appoint enough 'national figures' to keep the balance in favor of the elite.

Meanwhile, the interim president had announced a roadmap to a Constituent Assembly (CA, 3 March 2011) and later issued a decree suspending the old constitution and regulating the interim functions of state institutions (Décret-Loi 14/2011-23/3/2011) without mentioning the ISROR. There is a reason for that; the ISROR had skillfully become the heart of the negotiations over the transition. Thanks to Ben 'Ashour's merger, the ISROR council had become the body with the strongest legitimacy, and its Experts' Committee the mastermind of all transitional legislation. By dissolving parliament, the Décret-Loi 14/2011 further enhanced ISROR's claims to be the only representative body left on the Tunisian political scene.

The newly established ISROR council was soon presented with two bills already prepared by the Experts' Committee: the first carrying regulations of the elections to the CA, and the second on the establishment of an Independent High Authority for the Elections (*al-Hay'a al-'Ulya al-Mustaqilla li-l-Intikhabat*, or ISIE, its French acronym). Both were fast-tracked to deliberation on accounts of the urgency to proceed to elections by the mid-summer date that the president had announced. These were only two of the main six pieces of legislation elaborated and approved by the ISROR<sup>87</sup>—what Ben 'Ashour blogged as 'the six acts of liberation.'<sup>88</sup>

The ISROR opted for direct election of members to the CA according to a closed-list proportional representation system within 4-to-10-seat districts. Lists had to be presented

---

<sup>87</sup> The act regulating the electoral commission, the ISIE (Décret-Loi 27/2011-18/4/2011), the act regulating the elections to the Constituent Assembly (Décret-Loi 35/2011-10/5/2011), the act regulating freedom of association (Décret-Loi 87/2011-24/9/2011), the act regulating the establishment and operation of political parties (Décret-Loi 88/2011-24/9/2011), the act regulating press freedom (Décret-Loi 115/2011-2/11/2011), the act regulating freedom of the other media (Décret-Loi 116/2011-2/11/2011).

<sup>88</sup> Les six lois de la libération. In Yadh Ben Achour, 'La transition démocratique en Tunisie,' in *Le Blog de Yadh Ben Achour*, 26/10/2012. [http://yadhba.blogspot.ch/2012/10/la-transition-democratique-en-tunisie\\_26.html](http://yadhba.blogspot.ch/2012/10/la-transition-democratique-en-tunisie_26.html) (accessed 9/4/2014).

with alternation of a male and a female candidate, and could not include former ruling party figures who held party or government posts, or figures who supported Ben Ali's candidature to the 2014 presidential elections. The government then issued a decree defining electoral districts and allocating seats (along the fairly strict rules set by the ISROR, Décret 1088/2011-3/8/2011). The ISROR also extended its long-hand on the electoral commission, the ISIE; even if the ISIE members were all appointed by *arrêt* of the Prime Minister, it was the ISROR that actually selected them.<sup>89</sup>

Elections of the CA were deferred from mid-summer (24/7/2011) to mid-autumn (23/10/2011), but were preceded by a pre-elections agreement among the main political parties (the eleven still on the ISROR plus Al-Nahda, which had left the ISROR in late June) on the tasks of the body to be elected: to serve for a year both as a CA (drafting the constitution) and ordinary House (passing legislation, holding government accountable, and preparing for a new round of general elections). Turnout on the day of the elections was fairly low (52 percent of eligible voters), and because of the size of the districts one thirds of the votes were cast for parties that won no seat.<sup>90</sup>

### **Egypt's Big Bang phase(s)**

In Egypt, the ousting of Mubarak in February 2011 signaled the beginning of the transition, but its roadmap changed repeatedly ever since. The existence of an act relinquishing powers to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) signaled institutional continuity before and after Mubarak's ouster. SCAF nonetheless proceeded immediately to the suspension of the constitution and the dissolution of both houses of parliament. The interim government last appointed by Mubarak kept serving for a few weeks, until 3 March 2011.

---

<sup>89</sup> See art. 8 of Décret-Loi 27/2011 (18/4/2011).

<sup>90</sup> Duncan Pickard, 'Challenges to Legitimate Governance in Post-Revolution Tunisia,' *The Journal of North African Studies* 16, 4 (2011): 639.

Immediately after the suspension of the 1971 constitution, SCAF appointed a committee to draft amendments to the suspended text in line with what Mubarak had promised in his last televised speech. The committee was composed of senior figures from the judiciary—including the committee's chair, Tariq al-Bishri (a respected intellectual with Islamist leanings)—and a surprising oddity: Subhi Saleh, a lawyer whose only salient trait was to be a prominent Muslim Brotherhood member. The composition of the committee signaled to many a deal between the army and the Brotherhood to control the transition. The committee drafted the amendments to the provisions indicated in Mubarak's last speech, but went further in tweaking other minor provisions and—most importantly—define a roadmap for the transition; a roadmap which featured elections first. It was clear that early polls would favor forces with rehearsed voter mobilisation strategies, namely the Brotherhood and regime holdovers. The committee, furthermore, introduced a provision sealing the deal and preventing any walkout, as it required an absolute majority of votes of all elected MPs to elect members to the CA.

In the amended version of art. 189, the committee proposed an indirectly-elected CA. Voters would vote for the elective members of both Houses of Parliament, who would later gather in a joint session to elect by absolute majority the members of the CA. The absolute-majority requirement is an anomaly, and inconsistent with the alleged aim of guaranteeing the broadest representation possible in the constitution-making body. The absolute-majority requirement, on the other hand, does not guarantee that equal representation is respected by the majority coalition, and binds all candidates to a 'ticket,' which prevents individual groups to choose who will represent them.<sup>91</sup>

---

<sup>91</sup> See Gianluca Parolin, "The Ticking Referendum and a 'Smarter Strategy'," *Al-Masry Al-Youm (English)*, 13/3/2011. <http://www.egyptindependent.com//opinion/ticking-referendum-and-%E2%80%9Csmarter-strategy%E2%80%9D> (accessed 16/7/2014).



The Brotherhood and the yet-to-be-dissolved former ruling party campaigned in favor of the committee's amendments. The pro-amendments campaign used common good arguments, raised the specter of an un-Islamic constitution, foreshadowed a long, insecure transition, and forewarned against a prolonged military rule. All the other political forces campaigned against the amendments, but the amendments passed by a landslide on 19 March 2011. The Big Bang capture of the transition was thus complete, and it took several legal shenanigans and ultimately a direct army intervention to undo that.

After the referendum had ensured the elections-first approach, the ensuing transition target became the electoral law. In the meanwhile, however, on 16 April 2011, the Supreme Administrative Court dissolved the former ruling party, the National Democratic Party (*al-Hizb al-Watani al-Dimuqrati*, NDP). Negotiations over the electoral law were then conducted between SCAF and various political actors—mainly parties (including the newly-founded Freedom and Justice Party, FJP, the Brotherhood's political arm), but also non-party organisations. Three draft laws were put forward by SCAF in May, June and September 2011, each incorporating some of the suggestions proposed earlier by the political forces. The final draft featured a '1/3-2/3' mixed electoral system, where one third of the seats were to be contested in first(-of-each-category)<sup>92</sup>-past-the-post (F\*PTP) districts by independent candidates, and two thirds were to be assigned according to proportional representation among closed party lists. Parties opposed the restriction to place candidates also in F\*PTP districts and the prohibition for F\*PTP district winners to later join a political party, claiming that allowing only independents to run in F\*PTP districts and preventing the winners to later affiliate to parties would help perpetuate electoral dynamics of the old regime. The restriction

---

<sup>92</sup> This oddity can be explained with the 50per cent quota reserved to Workers and Peasants (which was maintained from the previous electoral regulations). As a consequence, each 'individual' district was to elect two candidates: the Worker and Peasant with the highest number of votes within her category, and the 'professional' with the highest number of votes within her category. Every voter had two votes on the 'individual' ballot, and one vote on the PR ballot.

and the prohibition were removed from the final text, which ultimately led the Supreme Constitutional Court to declare the electoral law unconstitutional and dissolve parliament in June 2012, just days ahead of the runoffs for the presidential elections. The electoral law retained the 50 percent quota for 'Workers and Peasants', but not the quota for female candidates (only requiring each list to have at least one woman on it).<sup>93</sup>

Parliamentary elections were held over a three-month span from late-November 2011 to late-February 2012 (totaling 5 rounds or 20 polling days).<sup>94</sup> The Brotherhood-led coalition carried the day with more than 10 million votes, but the biggest surprise were the 7.5 million votes to the Salafi coalition, which kept quite a distance from the third contender, the New Wafd (2.4 million). The results of the Lower House suddenly projected at the center of the political scene a previously neglected player: the Salafi coalition led by al-Nur party—a player difficult to locate, with no record in parliamentary politics, unclear political positioning, and a certainly different worldview on state/Islam relations. Labeling it an Islamist party and placing it in the same category with the Brotherhood's FJP does not add clarity to the mix.

The goalpost for the parliamentary elections was the absolute majority required to elect members to the CA. According to the amendments passed in March 2011, the absolute majority of elective members of both houses was required: since the total number of these elective members was 678, the absolute majority required to elect the CA was 340. In the Lower House, the Brotherhood scored very well both in the PR and the F\*PTP seats carrying a total of 235 seats (127 PR, 108 F\*PTP), whereas Salafis did better in the PR seats carrying a

---

<sup>93</sup> A full account of the electoral reforms during the transition (and before) can be found in: Sahar F. Aziz, 'Revolution without Reform? A Critique of Egypt's Election Laws,' *The George Washington International Law Review* 45, 1 (2013): 1-83.

<sup>94</sup> May Elsayyad and Shima'a Hanafy looked at the voting preferences for secular/Islamist parties in the first parliamentary elections in Egypt and showed a correlation between illiteracy rates and preferences for Islamists, and levels of poverty and preferences for secular forces (which could also suggest patterns of old voter mobilisation from the pre-2011 era). They also show that the 'bandwagon' effect of the sequential voting had minimal impact on voter behavior. See: 'Voting Islamist or Voting Secular? An Empirical Analysis of Voting Outcomes in "Arab Spring" Egypt,' *Max Planck Institute for Tax Law and Public Finance Working Paper Series*, 2013-01 (2013).

total of 123 seats (96 PR, 27 F\*PTP), and the New Wafd only 38 (36 PR, 2 F\*PTP). Adding the Upper House seats, the Brotherhood could then count on 340 MPs, Salafis on 168, and New Wafd on 52. Even if it had a sufficient number of votes to elect the full CA, the FJP decided to join forces with al-Nur.

As even a quick look at the provision requiring an absolute majority could suggest, the second-degree election produced a ticket-like list of candidates, where the FJP and al-Nur decided on who had to represent whom and in what numbers. The ticket was pushed through, against the resentment of minor forces, which boycotted the vote and later withdrew from the CA. This first CA was short-lived, as the Supreme Administrative Court ruled in April 2012 that electing MPs to the CA contravened the interim constitution of March 2011. An agreement on the number of seats to be allotted to each constituency of Egyptian society was reached across the political spectrum, but the designation of the figures to fill these posts rested with the same majority that voted for the first CA; the second CA, elected in June 2012, faced the same challenges of the first one, including boycotts, withdrawals and threats of judicial dissolution. The second CA licensed a text in a fast-tracked fashion that generated widespread mockery on 30 November 2012. A referendum with low turnout approved the text which was promulgated by president Mursi in late December 2012. The second CA was later declared to have been invalidly elected by the Supreme Constitutional Court in early June 2013, but with no effect on the 2012 Constitution.

After the ouster of Mursi in early July 2013, the 2012 constitution was suspended, and an interim constitution issued by the interim president (the president of the Supreme Constitutional Court, 'Adli Mansur). Mansur, a Mubarak appointee to the court in 1992, had just been appointed by Mursi to be the president of the same court on 1 July 2013. When Commander-in-Chief and Minister of Defence 'Abd al-fattah al-Sisi announced on tv the removal of Mursi, he also announced the appointment of Mansur as interim president. On 4

July Mansur had first to swear his oath as president of the SCC, and then as interim president of Egypt.

A few days later, on 8 July, Mansur issued a constitutional declaration carrying a temporary constitution to regulate the interim period until amendments to the 2012 constitution were proposed by a committee of ten jurists (the C-10), and approved by a committee of fifty figures appointed by him to represent all sectors of Egyptian society (the C-50). Two years of transition had suddenly been obliterated and a new Big Bang phase had just started, with the interim president (a proxy?) appropriating it. The flow of appointments and authority to amend the 2012 constitution came solely from the interim president, and what is more striking is that--conversely--in the eyes of Egyptian voters Mansur played a fairly ancillary role in day-to-day decision-making.<sup>95</sup>

Narrowly construing the president's broad directives, the C-10 drafted amendments to the 2012 constitution that did not touch the latter's core. In doing so, however, the C-10 allowed institutional interests to pervade the operation, thus placing the judiciary at the very heart of constitutional design by requiring its intervention at every turn. After completing the drafting, the C-10 sent the proposed amendments to the president, who selected and appointed the members of the wider committee charged with discussing the proposed amendments, the C-50. The composition of the C-50 suffered from the same lack of balance of the previous two CAs, in that one ideological current was overrepresented. Whereas in the first and second CAs that overrepresented current was the one of political Islam (in its broad variants), in the latter's case it was the secular/nationalist.

In stark contrast with the conservative reading of the president's directives by the C-10, the C-50 interpreted its role extensively; it did not limit itself to discuss the amendments

---

<sup>95</sup> On the occasion of the bomb attack on the Home Secretary, Egyptian state television broadcast first the deploration by the Commander-in-Chief and Minister of Defence, then moved on to the following news item: 'also the President deplores...'.

proposed by the C-10, but it engaged in re-discussing all the provisions of the 2012 constitution. The C-50 operated in sub-committees based on the sections of the 2012 Constitution—this prevented a full reconsideration of the overall structure, allowing to trace similarities all the way back to the 1971 text (since the second CA operated on the same assumption of textual continuity). The C-50 final text was purged from the excesses of the provisions introduced by the C-10 to entrench the institutional interest of the judiciary in the constitutional design, but it carries clear marks of all the group interests that the president had empowered through appointment. The final text also carries clear marks of the inability of C-50 members to decide on many crucial issues; this can be detected in the many decisions delegated to ordinary legislation (both in areas of fundamental rights and institutional design), and can in turn be attributed to the awareness of the shaky legitimacy behind the committee and its operation. As has been argued elsewhere,<sup>96</sup> this feature needs not necessarily be considered adversely; especially in the context of a transition, the flexibility of the text (in this case by weak entrenchment) has had illustrious supporters.

The constitutionally-mandated referendum took place in January 2014, amidst a very polarised political climate, which put the approval rate of the voters to 98.1 percent. The turnout was low but slightly beyond the previous referendum on the constitution, from 32.9 to 38.1 percent of eligible voters.

### **A murkier (yet more promising) Big Bang between Tunisia and Egypt: Libya**

In Libya, the assassination of Gaddafi and fall of Sirte in October 2011 signaled the beginning of the transition, but the process had started earlier in February 2011 when the National Transitional Council (*al-Majlis al-Watani al-Intiqali*, NTC) was formed and its original 33 members proclaimed it in early March 2011 the only legitimate representative of Libya.

---

<sup>96</sup> Gianluca Parolin, 'On the Virtues of Inconclusiveness: The Egyptian Constitution of 2014,' *IAI OpMed*, 2014 [http://www.iai.it/pdf/mediterraneo/GMF-IAI/Op-Med\\_24.pdf](http://www.iai.it/pdf/mediterraneo/GMF-IAI/Op-Med_24.pdf) [accessed: 11/4/2014].

Chairman of the NTC was Mustafa 'Abd al-Jalil, Gaddafi's former Minister of Justice, and the Executive Board of the NTC was chaired by Mahmud Jibril, a close friend and aid of Gaddafi's son and heir designate, Sayf al-Islam.

Even before liberation, the NTC expanded its membership to include newly controlled areas and adopted a constitutional declaration (*I'lan Dusturi*, 3/8/2011), which regulated the transitional phase in detail (art. 30). The NTC was to (1.) expand its membership, and (2.) after liberation (2.1.) move its headquarters to Tripoli, (2.2.) appoint an interim government tasked with (2.2.1.) drafting an electoral law, (2.2.2.) establishing an electoral commission, and (2.2.3.) calling for elections to a 200-member strong assembly within an 8-month timeframe. The NTC would then (3.) disband, and within 30 days the newly formed General National Council (*al-Mu'tamar al-Watani al-'Amm*, GNC) was to (4.1.) appoint a new government, and (4.2.) choose a constitution-making body to draft a constitution in 60 days.<sup>97</sup> The draft constitution had then to be approved both (5.1.) by the GNC (without any majority requirement), and (5.2.) by popular referendum with a two-third majority, then (5.3.) ratified by the constitution-making body, and (5.4.) signed<sup>98</sup> by the GNC. Art. 30 goes further into regulating the aftermath; the GNC within 30 days (6.1.) had to issue an electoral law, and (6.2.) call for general elections within six months. The electoral process had to be (6.3.) governed by the NTC-appointed electoral commission, and (6.4.) conducted under the supervision of the judiciary, and the monitoring of the UN and other international and regional organisations. And, finally, (7.) the GNC would disband after having confirmed the results of the elections. The constitutional Big Bang moment seemed to be over even before it started, ably captured by the members of the NTC. But that is, only if we freeze the frame in the mid-summer of 2011, before liberation.

---

<sup>97</sup> The Constitutional Declaration opts for language that allows broad interpretation: 'choosing' (*ikhtiyar*) instead of electing, appointing, .. and 'constitution-making body' (*hay'a ta'sisiyya*) instead of assembly, committee, .. (art. 30).

<sup>98</sup> Here the text employs again: *yu'tamad* (passive form) as in 5.1.

The NTC did expand its membership, and after liberation it even tried to overcome its local imprint by appointing as chair of its Executive Board a member of a prominent family of Western Libya, 'Abd al-Rahim al-Kib, who served from late November 2011 until a government was formed after the first general elections in summer 2012.

Challenges to the NTC came from all directions.<sup>99</sup> Institutionally, the NTC was criticised for hosting too many last-minute defectors, being torn by internal rivalries, and maintaining a geographical unbalance in favour of Eastern Libya. The NTC was also under constant and unrelenting pressure from militia leaders who wanted a say in government or refused to recognise its authority (and disarm), from Islamists who either just felt underrepresented or were squarely building alternative discourses of legitimate governance, and also local (and even ethnic) cleavages—most notably, Eastern Libya leaders established themselves as the Council of Cyrenaica in Spring 2012 and started confronting the central NTC government.

In early 2012, before the general elections to the GNC, the NTC decided to substantiate the ambiguous 'choose a constitution-making body to draft a constitution' of art. 30 (point 4.2. here) in an amendment to the constitutional declaration of August 2011. In a bid to conquer the hearts of federalists, the constitution-making body was now to be formed by the GNC 'along the lines of the 1951 body that drafted the first Libyan constitution after independence': a body of sixty members—twenty from each region (Cyrenaica, Fezzan and Tripolitania)—to be selected by GNC members outside their ranks. Deliberations were set at 2/3s plus one of members in order to guarantee that at least one member from each region is on board.<sup>100</sup> This was the first of a series of six amendments to the constitutional declaration in three years (Amendment #1 of 13/3/2012). Appeasing Islamists did not require formal

---

<sup>99</sup> Sawani and Pack attribute responsibility for the declining legitimacy of central authorities to the TNC itself, and its response strategy to the many challenges brought against it. Youssef Sawani and Jason Pack, 'Libyan Constitutionality and Sovereignty Post-Qadhafi: The Islamist, Regionalist, and Amazigh Challenges,' *The Journal of North African Studies* 18, 4 (2013): 523-543. One could actually reverse the argument by considering how—in the face of all internal and external challenges and weak institutions to work with—the transitional government has managed to navigate the turbulent waters and carry on.

<sup>100</sup> Art. 30 of the constitutional declaration of 3/8/2011 as amended on 13/3/2012.

amendments; procrastinating elections, a few public statements and a self-inflicted decline in popularity of the competing narrative of Islamic governance all contributed to shelving the Islamist threat to the NTC.

In June 2012, the timeframe for the elections to the GNC was extended (Amendment #2 of 10/6/2012), and right before the elections—and pending a boycott threat—the TNC agreed on establishing the election of the constitution-making body (Amendment #3 of 5/7/2012). On 7 July 2012 elections to the GNC were held, on 8 August a formal handover from the TNC to the GNC was celebrated, and after several failed attempts to government formation by Mustafa Abu Shaqur, on 14 November 2012 the liberal 'Ali Zaydan took office. In the meanwhile, another amendment fixed the majority required for a list of legislation areas to 120 members (sixty percent; Amendment #4 of 1/9/2012).

In February 2013, the constitutional court declared Amendment #3 to be unconstitutional on procedural grounds, because of lack of quorum. A few weeks later, however, the GNC re-introduced the amendment, signaling how it represented a building block of the political arrangement sustaining the whole institutional architecture of the transition. The GNC also introduced a provision to prevent the court from invalidating the lustration law that the GNC was about to pass, and fixed the majority requirement to 101 votes (absolute majority; Amendment #5 of 11/4/2011). In view of the implementation of the lustration law, president Muhammad al-Maqrif resigned in May 2013 and the Berber Nuri Abu Sahmayn was sworn in on 25 June 2013.

As the 18-month second phase of the transition was drawing near without a constitutional text on the horizon (8/8/2012-7/2/2014), an extension to the GNC was first negotiated and approved by the GNC (Amendment #6 of 5/2/2014). The agreement was short-lived and political confrontations started heating up again both in the council and in the streets, and eventually led to the sacking of Prime Minister 'Ali Zaydan on 11 March 2014, who then fled to



Europe. In the meanwhile, elections to the constitution-making body were held first on 20 February 2014 amidst extremely low voters turnout and extremely high street violence, which prevented polling in a number of locations. A second and a third round were called to fill the 13 empty seats (including the ones deserted because of ethnic-minority boycotts).

A new roadmap was proposed by the February Commission (*Lajnat Fibrayir*), established within the GNC, and its suggestions were expressly referred to in a new amendment to the constitutional declaration (Amendment #7 of 11/3/2014). The roadmap foresaw two scenarios<sup>101</sup>: (A) either the CA succeeded in finalising a draft within 120 days from its first session (scheduled for 14/4/2014, but delayed until further notice because of protests blocking the airport of al-Bayda'), or (B) not, in which case a third phase of the transition would open, holding elections for a new assembly (to be called: House of Representatives). According to Amendment #7, the draft constitution no longer needs to be approved by the GNC; it will be immediately submitted to a popular referendum, and it will become the new constitution only if approved by at least two thirds of the votes cast (as previously decided), and with the consensus of ethnic minority members on the provisions affecting ethnic minorities—a last-minute offer to Amazigh, Tuareg and Tubu leaders to abandon their boycott of the CA. Amendment #7 also left to the decision of the House of Representative how to select the president.

The opening ceremony of the CA (popularly known as the C-60, *Lajnat al-sittin*) did eventually take place on 21 April 2014 in al-Bayda'. Less than a month later, on 18 May 2014, General Khalifa Hiftar declared the GNC dissolved and that the GNC functions should be assumed by the CA.

---

<sup>101</sup> What follows in the text is how the roadmap is popularly understood and explained by politicians and media, even if the provisions of Amendment #7 are far less clear. It should come to no surprise as it is a repeatedly amended long provision, art. 30.

## **Big Bang captures: success stories and their costs**

Capturing the Big Bang moment of the constitution-making process does not necessarily mean that the constitution will look exactly like you wanted, just as the existence of a particular individual, group or institutional interest in the constitution-making process does not mean that a particular design choice will be found in the final text. Capturing the Big Bang moment, however, does guarantee an advantage in allowing certain interests to play a larger role in the process. Regardless of their countless differences, all the post-2011 North African experiences show how decisions on (1) 'who' should write the constitution and (2) 'when' were the two key choices made by actors who ranged on the political spectrum from regime holdovers to non-representative bodies.

The (3) 'how' was inescapable: elections. Direct or indirect, it had to be elections. If we were to pull the zoom in, however, we would see that all the elements that make a difference in elections were safely kept in the hands of those who captured the Big Bang: dates, requirements, electoral system, and districting. Independent electoral commissions were formed in all three jurisdictions to guarantee that such decisions were firmly implemented. And win international commendation.<sup>102</sup>

But just as every cloud has a silver lining, indicators point to the vitality of the drive for political participation that precipitated the revolutions and that can find its way through the patronising machinations of old regimes or 'national' elites. Considering the role of these latter actors in the roadmapping also challenges the simplified label of non-negotiated regime changes, used to contrast the post-2011 North African transitions with most of the post-1989

---

<sup>102</sup> Normative statements populate the world of international—often self-appointed—'advisers' on constitutional and electoral design. Measuring, however, the success of a transitional system on the merits of electoral change is taking it to a whole new level. Especially when ignoring the power dynamics behind electoral design. John M. Carey and Andrew Reynolds, 'The Impact of Election Systems,' *Journal of Democracy* 22, 4 (2011): 36-47.

regime changes in Eastern Europe.<sup>103</sup> The low turnout figures seem to suggest that voters do not intend to legitimate such machinations with their participation in elections that are fair to international standards but fail to fulfill their promise: representation. Lately, a number of laudable research efforts are addressing the marginalising effects of elections on a variety of social groups: not just women, youth and minorities, but also the less educated and rural citizens.<sup>104</sup>

Success stories of transitions are currently narrated along the lines of stability, often at the expenses of political participation.<sup>105</sup> Stability becomes the buzzword masking the operation of continuity at the expenses of change—one of the main demands when revolutions suddenly opened the arena of political participation. A strain of literature in comparative constitutional law and politics currently argues in favor of limitations to political participation either in the form of democratic self-preservation mechanisms<sup>106</sup> or by allowing non-democratic players a say in democratic transitions.<sup>107</sup> The democratic commitment of those enforcing the self-preservation mechanisms or the non-democratic players is obviously a problem that those in favor of limiting political participation cannot guarantee. In the short term, stability seems to be directly related to the degree of success of the Big Bang capturing, and therefore adversely related to the degree of openness to political participation.

The two phases of the Tunisian transition guaranteed success to the soft-handed class operation of continuity by enhancing its legitimacy: whereas during the first phase there was a handover from old regime figures to (old) elite ones, in the second phase these (old) elite

---

<sup>103</sup> Vicki Jackson, and Mark Tushnet, *Comparative Constitutional Law*, 2nd ed. (New York: Foundation Press, 2006), 278-80.

<sup>104</sup> See the Transitional Governance Project at <http://www.transitionalgovernanceproject.org>. In particular, the work of Ellen Lust, who is also focusing on representing political preferences rather than cleavages.

<sup>105</sup> Ann Lesch, 'Troubled Political Transitions: Tunisia, Egypt and Libya,' *Middle East Policy* 21, 1 (2014): 62-74. Even Nathan Brown falls in the trap, but by doing so, he recognises that 'transitions are not designed but politically shaped', in 'Egypt's Failed Transition', *Journal of Democracy* 24, 4 (2013): 56.

<sup>106</sup> This usually goes under the heading of 'militant democracy.' Samuel Issacharoff, 'Fragile Democracies,' *Harvard Law Review*, 120, 6 (2007): 1405-15.

<sup>107</sup> Ozan Varol, 'The Democratic Coup d'État', *Harvard International Law Journal* 53, 2 (2012): 292, 293-4.

figures strove to guarantee an advantage to their fellows in the drafting stage while disengaging from the old regime. All at the expense of the openness of the political space to newcomers. Heavy-handed captures of the Big Bang moments in Egypt deprived these operations of their most-needed goods: legitimacy. Continuity and stability were obtained by suppressing political opposition and stifling participation, both under the 2012 and the 2014 constitutions. The Libyan case is an important addition because it shows repeated and continuous failure in securing the Big Bang moment; while Big Bang capturing has been more successful in Tunisia and Egypt, in Libya the presence of multiple and fractured power centers is preventing it. In that sense, Libya's perspectives on short-term stability may be slim, but the openness of its political space more robust.

What are the costs of the success stories to the East and West of Libya? Tunisia's political space has been entirely occupied on the one hand by (old) elite figures recast in new parties and on the other hand by Al-Nahda--who have now entrenched their positions in state institutions (at the expenses of all other political forces--on the left and the right of the spectrum--and the marginalised). Egypt's re-capturing and immediate entrenchment in a new constitution, coupled with a severe crackdown on political participation seems to suggest that the political space has been and will be sealed off for quite some time. A deeper understanding of Big Bang capturing seems to be one of the ways of bringing a little drizzle on the parade of continuity, since the current framing of constitutional change allows for the limitation of political participation, and the ensuing inhibition of change.

# The Project of Advanced Regionalisation in Morocco: Analysis of a Lampedusian Reform

RAQUEL OJEDA GARCÍA<sup>108</sup> and ÁNGELA SUÁREZ COLLADO<sup>109</sup>

*ABSTRACT This article examines the project of advanced regionalisation in Morocco, in which the King Mohammed VI plays a key role. Through a comparative analysis of the adjustments and resiliencies of the project, contrasted with previous regionalisation reforms, the article contends that contention dynamics in Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt have had a relevant impact on the way in which the project made its way in the Moroccan institutional sphere. The article finds that the eruption of the Arab Uprisings in North Africa and protests in Morocco has been a key factor in paradoxically fostering the king's power, allowing him to consolidate himself as the unique driving force behind the reform of regional administration.*

**Keywords:** Regionalisation, Moroccan politics, Advanced regionalisation project, Arab uprisings, Public policies.

The decision to undertake a project of advanced regionalisation in Morocco was announced by King Mohammed VI in January 2010, well before street protests ousted dictators in Tunisia and Egypt and spread to Morocco. At that time, the reform was presented to the public as a new phase of Morocco's regionalisation policy and as a strategy for modernising the country. However, the public presentation of the final project was officially made when the first Moroccan demonstrations had already taken place. The protests were used to justify the need

---

<sup>108</sup> Faculty of Polical Science and Sociology, University of Granada. Email: rojeda@ugr.es

<sup>109</sup> Käte Hamburger Kolleg Centre for Global Cooperation Research, University of Duisburg-Essen. Email: suarez-collado@gcr21.uni-due.de

for a constitutional reform, which was the king's main response to popular demands for democracy, social justice and the end of corruption. In that context of political turmoil, his inauguration of the advanced regionalisation project passed largely unnoticed by most political parties and civil society organisations, though they had previously taken part in the public debate about it. Likewise, the project was temporarily dropped from the political agenda of the current government, which took three years to propose a draft law for the implementation of the reform. Only a few activist groups and political parties based in specific territories where regional differences are relevant and traditionally present continued in the interim to demand institutional recognition of regional particularism, a greater degree of self-government and the legalisation of regional parties – a norm which is absent, anyway, from the final draft of the advanced regionalisation project.

The unfolding of the 'Arab Spring' in Morocco has highlighted a number of contradictions, such as the simultaneous promotion of change and maintenance of the status quo. This dynamic has been highlighted in many studies, which have found the king's particular position to be the biggest beneficiary of this interplay between continuity and change.<sup>110</sup> This paper builds on that literature to examine the overlapping of the two tendencies in the case of decentralisation reform by contrasting its characteristics and political function before and after the mobilisations of 2011, offering a novel analysis of the effects that local politics and regional adjustments have had on national politics in a historical perspective.

Four factors make the case study of regionalisation reform interesting. The first is that MENA countries have some of the most centralised government structures in the world,<sup>111</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> George Joffé, 'The Arab spring in North Africa: origins and prospects', *The Journal of North African Studies* 16, 4 (2011): 507-532. Steven Heydemann, and Reinoud Leenders, 'Authoritarian Learning and Authoritarian Resilience: Regime Responses to the 'Arab Awakening'', *Globalizations* 8, 5 (2011): 647-653.

<sup>111</sup> Mehmet S. Tosun and Serdar Yilmaz, 'Centralization, Decentralization and Conflict in the Middle East and North Africa,' *Middle East Development Journal* 2, 1 (2010): 1-14.

making the Moroccan commitment to regionalisation an unusual case.<sup>112</sup> Second, this particular reform served as a 'bridge' for other reforms because of its crucial position vis-à-vis international requirements, such as requests for greater local autonomy from the European Union, and domestic challenges, such as the Western Sahara question. Third, despite its relevance, the project shifted from a publicly debated issue to a matter primarily held in the king's hands, ignored by the larger public. The fourth and last factor is the reform's timely falling priority on the political agenda, which coincided with the eruption of protests in the country. These aspects make the project of advanced regionalisation an interesting lens to highlight the co-existence of change and continuity before and after the impact of the Arab uprisings, particularly as the uprisings themselves have been a crucial factor in determining such continuities and changes.

This paper finds that, paradoxically, the burst of protests demanding change was a key factor in fostering the continuity of the king's power. In particular, it is argued that the absence of demands for greater regionalisation and decentralisation among the protesters' key requests in Morocco and the low interest that other institutional actors, such as the government, had in this issue allowed the king to consolidate himself as the unique driving force behind the reform. In addition, he succeeded in patronising the reform of power distribution in the national territory, a political measure that has always been considered a marker of democratisation. He became the only political personality able to control the reform process, thereby guaranteeing the balance of continuity and change, maintaining the nature of the political system and his prominence within it.

---

<sup>112</sup> In the case of Africa, attempts at decentralisation have been defined as 'disappointing.' See: James S. Wunsch, 'Analyzing self-organized local governance initiatives: are there insights for decentralization reforms?', *Public Administration and Development* 33 (2013): 221. See also Tyler Dockovick and Rachel Beatty Riedl, *Comparative Assessment of Decentralization in Africa: Final Report and Summary of Findings* (USAID: Washington, 2010).

The paper is divided into three sections. The first provides a general outline of the project of advanced regionalisation, introducing its characteristics and analysing the role of King Mohammed VI in its development and design. The second section contrasts the current project with previous ones, highlighting adjustments and constants in policy evolution. The final section examines the reactions of social and political actors to the final project during the aftermath of the uprisings. Those reactions are relevant not only because they symbolise the actual and concrete impact of the reforms on social constituencies, but also because they highlight the conflictual environment brought about by the protests, which impacted the way in which the project made its way through the institutional political sphere.

The methodology deployed encompasses discourse analysis, the study of official documents generated by the Moroccan state, political parties, associations, social and political groups, and fieldwork observations. There is a focus on governance structures and policy-making processes because the very form of institutions helps explain continuity and change in policies. As neo-institutionalist theory demonstrates, the resilience of certain forms of governance determines the likelihood of a break with the past, and this seems particularly true when it comes to the role institutions play in decision- and policy-making processes.<sup>113</sup> The focus on the monarchy and royal commissions is thus useful to highlight the strength of path-dependent policy development<sup>114</sup> and its connection to the broader issue of the resilience of authoritarianism. Morocco is not the only authoritarian regime using agendas of institutional reform and controlled change to maintain power, however. Indeed, the vast literature on authoritarian resilience has spot-lit the role of reforms in strengthening and

---

<sup>113</sup> James G. March, Johan P. Olsen, 'The New Institutionalism: Organization factors in political life,' *American Political Science Review* 78 (1984): 738-749; Guy B. Peters, *Institutional Theory: the new institutionalism in Political Science* (London: Cassels, 1999).

<sup>114</sup> Historical institutionalism and the notion of path-dependence have been criticised for not explaining change (see Ian Greener, 'The potential of Path Dependence in Political Studies,' *Politics* 25, 1 (2005): 62-72) and emphasising the resilience of policies or structures after institutional decisions. See: Guy Peters, Jon Pierre, Desmond King, 'The Politics of Path Dependency: Political conflict in Historical Institutionalism,' *The Journal of Politics* 67, 4 (2005): 1275-1300.



renovating authoritarianism, and the regionalisation project in Morocco is a good example of how authoritarians can benefit from ‘fostering change.’

Finally, we deploy a model for policy analysis based on six criteria crucial to the policy itself. We will use them to assess the degree of regional autonomy established by advanced regionalisation<sup>115</sup>: democratisation (a region’s degree of representation and institutional legitimacy); human and fiscal resources (a region’s capacity for thoroughly exercising its competences); good governance (the management of public affairs effectively and efficiently, and attentiveness to citizens’ demands) and agencification (the presence and role of ad hoc agencies for public governance); transfer of power from state to regions (number and nature of competencies transferred); *tutelle* (state supervision of regions’ affairs and management) and regional division (criteria used to establish regional demarcation). By contrasting these criteria against the policy’s content, we aim to offer a broader assessment of its performance in terms of the continuities and changes it reveals in relation to the pre-2011 status quo.

### **The King's regionalisation and its impact on the authoritarian system**

Scholars have examined regionalisation and decentralisation policies in North Africa for a number of reasons. In particular, the issue acquired relevance as a consequence of the adoption of neo-liberal reforms by North African regimes, which had to implement some forms of decentralisation due to international organisations’ conditions.<sup>116</sup> The Moroccan

---

<sup>115</sup> Regional autonomy is defined as the region’s legal competence and capability to regulate and manage its own internal affairs autonomously, following the principle of subsidiarity and within the frames of the constitution and law. See: Jean Van Cauwenberghe, ‘Suivi du cadre de référence pour la démocratie régionale,’ *Congrès des pouvoirs locaux et régionaux. Conseil de l’Europe*. [http://www.regionalisationavancee.ma/PDF/Rapport/EXPERTS\\_ETRANGERS/EE\\_USSG\\_01.pdf](http://www.regionalisationavancee.ma/PDF/Rapport/EXPERTS_ETRANGERS/EE_USSG_01.pdf) (accessed 18/9/2014).

<sup>116</sup> Sylvia Bergh, ‘Inclusive Neoliberalism, Local Governance Reforms and the Redeployment of State power: The Case of the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH) in Morocco,’ *Mediterranean Politics* 17, 3 (2012): 410-426; [Christopher Reesa and Farhad Hossain](#), ‘Perspectives on Decentralization and local Governance in Developing and Transitional Countries,’ *International Journal of Public Administration* 33, 12-13 (2010): 581-587.

monarchy had to start planning decentralisation policies in the 1990s. Despite the high number of studies on the topic, there is a tendency to prioritise issues of local governance and economic development to the detriment of any analysis of regionalisation policy within broader institutional and historical perspectives.<sup>117</sup> Despite the attention given to Morocco's decentralisation and regional model after its 1997 regional reform and the announcement of the Moroccan Autonomy Plan for Western Sahara,<sup>118</sup> other significant issues such as the historical trajectory of the regionalisation policy, its role in Moroccan politics and its impact on civil society activism deserve further examination. This article tries to fill these gaps by examining both the policy's historical unfolding and, consequently, the continuities and changes that characterise its latest version, as well as its repercussions on the social and political spheres in the context of national and regional political instability.

Regionalisation has been a central policy for the Moroccan regime for two reasons. Firstly, it has often been considered the solution to the regime's problems when it comes to the Western Sahara conflict and to European requirements in the framework of the EU Neighbourhood Policy, which imposes, among several other measures, greater decentralisation to the involved parties. It has also represented an efficient instrument to manage internal power distribution among local elites.<sup>119</sup> Secondly, it has political significance

---

<sup>117</sup> Michel Rousset, *La déconcentration régionale au Maroc: une avancée significative* (Paris: CNRS, 2003); Myriam Catusse, Raffaele Cattedra and Mohammed Idrissi Janati, 'Decentralisation and its paradoxes in Morocco,' in Barbara Driusken, Franck Mermier and Heiko Wimmen (eds.), *Cities of the South* (London: Saqi Books, 2007): 113-135; Charles Saint-Prot et. al. (eds.), *Vers un modèle marocain de régionalisation. État, territoire et développement dans un pays émergent*. (Paris: CNRS, 2010).

<sup>118</sup> Miguel de Larramendi, 'La cuestión del Sahara Occidental como factor de impulso del proceso de descentralización marroquí,' *Revista de Estudios Internacionales Mediterráneos* 9 (2010): 132-141; Yossef Ben-Meir, 'Morocco's regionalisation roadmap and the Western Sahara,' *World Affairs* 14, 2 (2010): 92-112; Amina El-Messaoudi, 'Le projet d'autonomie dans la région du Sahara: une pratique institutionnelle avancée,' *Revue d'administration locale et de développement* 107 (2012): 35-50; Marina Ottaway, 'Morocco: "Advanced decentralization" meets the Sahara Autonomy Initiative,' *View Points* 27 (Washington: Wilson Center, 2013).

<sup>119</sup> Raquel Ojeda, 'Descentralización y democracia en el marco del Estado marroquí,' in Carmelo Pérez (ed.), *La Sociedad civil, derechos humanos y democracia en Marruecos* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2006): 27-50. George Joffé, 'Sovereignty and the Western Sahara,' *The Journal of North African Studies* 15, 3 (2010): 375-384;

insofar as it has been rhetorically used by the king as an instrument for his legitimisation as promoter of change and national modernisation.<sup>120</sup>

However, in Morocco the regionalisation policy has never led to significant changes in the power structure of the state. From an historical perspective, regions appeared for the first time in 1971 as a means to respond to the country's needs for development and growth. Despite being economically inefficient, the regional model implemented after 1971 was politically very efficient in controlling peripheral dynamics through the renewal of local elite networks. The makhzen<sup>121</sup> has indeed been able to control local elites through various mechanisms operating in the regional sphere, and in particular by appointing local governors, by accepting the duplication of offices to allow candidates to be elected members of regional councils and the national Parliament at the same time, and by supporting rural notables.<sup>122</sup> Although the regions received legal recognition as territorial entities in the 1992 constitutional reform, the regional model continued unrevised until a second regional reform was implemented as part of the 1996 constitutional reform and the 1997 regional law. The

---

Paul Smoke, 'Decentralisation in Africa: goals, dimensions, myths and challenges,' *Public Administration and Development* 23 (2003): 7-16.

<sup>120</sup> 'This is a watershed moment, the start of a structural project which, hopefully, will mark a turning point in territorial governance [...] I also want it to be the beginning of a new dynamic towards a thorough institutional reform [...] Viewed from this angle, the extensive regionalisation we want to achieve is not a mere technical or administrative procedure, but rather a major initiative for the overhaul and modernization of state structures and for the achievement of integrated development'. Mohammed VI's speech to the nation, 3/1/2010. All royal speeches are available at <http://www.map.ma/fr/> (accessed 18/9/2014). Other states have used decentralisation in a similar vein, Hubert Ouedrago, 'Decentralisation and local governance: experiences from francophone West Africa,' *Public Administration and Development* 23 (2003): 97-103.

<sup>121</sup> Francesco Cavatorta and Vincent Durac define the makhzen as an 'informal governing alliance between the monarch, his advisers, selected businessmen, high-ranking bureaucrats and tribal chiefs operating as the unelected and unaccountable decision-makers in the country beyond the control of the elected government' (*Civil Society and Democratization in the Arab World: The Dynamics of Activism*, London: Routledge, 2010: 57).

<sup>122</sup> Ojeda, *Políticas de descentralización en Marruecos. El proceso de regionalización*. (Sevilla: Instituto Andaluz de Administración Pública-Junta Andalucía, 2002).

1997 regional law established sixteen regions with the goal of breaking down the country's old cultural, historical, linguistic and tribal identities.<sup>123</sup>

Regions had a weak legislative initiative and limited powers. Both regionalisation processes of 1992 and 1997 showed that Moroccan regional policy was characterised by deconcentration rather than decentralisation of power, because of the limited transfer of competencies and human and financial resources from the central state to the regions.<sup>124</sup> The main idea behind both models was to maintain a centralised state to control the political system and preserve the country's territorial integrity, cohesion and homogeneity by leaving the regions with no political or economic power.<sup>125</sup>

On 3 January 2010, King Mohammed VI publically announced the creation of the Consultative Commission on Regionalism (CCR) and entrusted this body with the task of preparing a project that would lay the foundations for a future decentralisation plan.<sup>126</sup> This project would constitute the third phase of Morocco's regionalisation policy, known as advanced regionalisation. Through this new process the Moroccan state was complying with various foreign and domestic pressures. Indeed, the European Union's requirements imposed

---

<sup>123</sup> The 1997 regional law divided Northern Morocco into three distinct regions. In this respect, the two Rif provinces, Nador and Al Hoceima, both with strong regional identities, were separated. López and Larramendi, 'Sahara y regionalización', cit.; Ojeda, *Políticas de descentralización en Marruecos*, cit.; Saint-Prot et al., *Vers un modèle marocain de régionalisation. État, territoire et développement dans un pays émergent*, cit.

<sup>124</sup> In Moroccan institutional history, largely influenced by the French tradition, the representatives of the central power at the local level are called 'déconcentrées' whereas the local elected authorities are called 'décentralisées'. 'Decentralisation' refers here to the transfer of competencies and resources to local elective authorities, while 'deconcentration' refers to administrative decentralisation. Following Rees and Hossein, who offer a typology of decentralisation distinguishing between deconcentration, delegation, privatisation and devolution, this paper uses the following definition: decentralisation as devolution, which involves the creation or strengthening of local units of government that, to a large extent, operate outside the direct control of the central authority. Rees and Hossein, 'Perspectives on Decentralization and local Governance in Developing and Transitional Countries', cit. See also Rousset, *La déconcentration régionale au Maroc*, cit. and Catusse, Cattedra and Janati, 'Decentralisation and its paradoxes in Morocco,' cit.

<sup>125</sup> Ojeda, *Políticas de descentralización en Marruecos*, cit.; Pieter Good, Ben Derudder and Frank Witlox, 'The Regionalization of Africa: Delineating Africa's Subregions Using Airline Data,' *Journal of Geography* 110, 5 (2011): 179-190.

<sup>126</sup> Mohammed Benyahya, 'Le roi Mohammed VI et l'idée de régionalisation', in Saint-Prot et al., *Vers un modèle marocain de régionalisation*, cit.: 59-68; M. El Yaagoubi, 'La notion de régionalisation avancée dans les discours royaux,' *Revue marocaine d'administration locale et de développement. Collection Textes et Documents*, 71 (2010): 12-41.

on Morocco in the framework of the EU Neighbourhood Policy, the 2007-2013 Action Plan EU-Morocco and the Advanced Status agreements<sup>127</sup> were particularly pressing in asking the monarchy to proceed with regionalisation. Moreover, the insistence of some states, such as France and the United States, to find a solution to the Western Sahara question through decentralisation was strong. There were a number of additional issues that the regionalisation project meant to address, such as providing a political framework within which the Moroccan Autonomy Plan could be credible and admissible,<sup>128</sup> helping new elites to emerge and replace traditional leaders, and renovating the legitimacy of political institutions.

The tactic of setting up ad hoc institutions or commissions at the margins of the parliament and government has frequently been employed in Moroccan history to address strategic questions. It has allowed the monarchy to drive the organisation of internal pluralism from above.<sup>129</sup> This strategy, adopted by Mohammed VI to satisfy his preference for technocratic government while remaining the main driver of all political processes, mirrors the king's idea of authority. The idea is of an 'executive monarchy' that governs and controls the limit of what is politically permissible. In such a context, in the last two decades royal speeches have become the main reference for social and political stakeholders, the dynamo of all change and

---

<sup>127</sup> These requirements were the demand of structural reform and modernisation of the judiciary system. Irene Fernández Molina and Rafael Bustos, 'El estatuto avanzado de UE-Marruecos y la presidencia española de la UE', *Memorandum Opex*, 26/2/2010, <http://www.falternativas.org/opex/documentos/memorandos/memorando-opex-n1-135-2010-el-estatuto-avanzado-ue-marruecos-y-la-presidencia-espanola-de-la-ue> (accessed 18/9/2014); Agh Attila, 'Regionalisation as a Driving Force of EU Widening: Recovering from the EU "Carrot Crisis" in the East,' *Europe-Asia Studies* 62, 8 (2010): 1239-1266.

<sup>128</sup> Kristina Kausch, *Morocco's 'Advanced Status': Model or Muddle?*, FRIDE Policy Brief, 43 (2010) [http://www.fride.org/download/PB43\\_Morocco\\_advance\\_status\\_ENG\\_mar10.pdf](http://www.fride.org/download/PB43_Morocco_advance_status_ENG_mar10.pdf) (accessed 18/9/2014).

<sup>129</sup> Frédéric Vairel, 'Protesting in authoritarian situations: Egypt and Morocco in comparative perspective,' in Joel Beinin and Frédéric Vairel (eds.), *Social movements, mobilisation, contestation in the Middle East and North Africa* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013): 33-48; Irene Fernández Molina, 'Los consejos consultivos: gobierno sin representación y diplomacia paralela,' in Thierry Desrues and Hernando de Larramendi (eds.), *Mohamed VI. Política y cambio social en Marruecos* (Córdoba: Almuzara, 2011): 34-41.

the core around which consensus on policies is constructed.<sup>130</sup> In a similar vein, advanced regionalisation was often referred to in royal speeches as a pivotal policy for the state, along with the reform of the judiciary system, extensive devolution and the establishment of a new social charter<sup>131</sup> through which the king aimed to consolidate good governance, defined as ‘the key to democracy and development,’<sup>132</sup> and modernise the state.<sup>133</sup> This whole reform agenda was placed within the framework of a controlled political opening initiated in the 1990s with the so-called *alternance*, which still continues, consistent with the king’s political vision.

The creation of the CCR followed a top-down dynamic of control and allowed the king to situate himself at the top of the reform process, which originated and developed outside the Parliament and its procedures. It was also the king who established the specific guidelines and fundamental pillars the CCR must follow in its work. These are: a strong commitment to the nation’s sacred and immutable values (the unity of the state, the nation and the territory); the principle of solidarity; a balanced distribution of resources between the central power and local authorities; and the adoption of an extensive devolution within the framework of an efficient system of territorial governance based on harmony and convergence.<sup>134</sup> The monarch also called for ‘a wholly Moroccan regionalisation model, based on the country’s specificities,’<sup>135</sup> rejecting the idea of establishing a ‘mere imitation’ or replication of other countries’ experiences, such as the German or Spanish territorial systems, which had been a

---

<sup>130</sup> Maria Angustias Parejo and Laura Feliu, ‘Identidad y regionalización: los actores políticos marroquíes ante la reforma constitucional de 2011,’ *Revista de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociológicas* 12, 3 (2013): 109-126.

<sup>131</sup> Speech at the opening of parliament, September 2009, Speech on the 56th anniversary of the Revolution of the King and the People, August 2009, and Speech to the nation on the 10th Anniversary of the Day of the Throne, 30/7/2009.

<sup>132</sup> Speech to the nation on the 10th Anniversary of the Day of the Throne, 30/7/2009.

<sup>133</sup> Speech to the nation, 3/1/2010.

<sup>134</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

strong reference in the past.<sup>136</sup> The CCR was headed by Omar Azziman, who had different appointments at ministerial level. He was Ambassador to Spain when appointed chair of the commission, composed of twenty-one members with different profiles, mainly technocrats with no intention of crossing the red lines established by the king.<sup>137</sup>

Although formally the CCR was the only institution responsible for designing the new regional model for the country, some space for bottom-up interaction was created, allowing social and political actors to take part in the process.<sup>138</sup> Thus, over the fourteen months the CCR was operative, it received 124 written and oral proposals focusing on three main issues<sup>139</sup>: the re-organisation of regional political institutions<sup>140</sup>; the relationship between centre and periphery<sup>141</sup>; and the boundaries of the future regions.<sup>142</sup> Outside official channels, the creation of the CCR also provoked intense activity, whereby political parties, local associations and groups organised their own meetings and debates on the issue. These

---

<sup>136</sup> López and Larramendi, *“Sahara y regionalización”*, cit.; Mohammed Benyahya (ed.), *Régions et régionalisation en Droit marocain et en Droit comparé* (Rabat : Publications de la Revue Marocaine d’administration locale et de développement, 2010); Benyahya (ed.), *L’Autonomie Régionale. L’initiative marocaine à la lumière des expériences étrangères d’autonomies régionales* (Rabat : Publications de la Revue Marocaine d’administration locale et de développement, 2010).

<sup>137</sup> Three lawyers, one political scientist, one geographer, one sociologist, three members associated with regional business environment, two members from the financial sector, one specialist of planning and public policies, and three members from local governance, civil society actors were also part of the Commission.

<sup>138</sup> To consult the list of stakeholders: <http://www.regionalisationavancee.ma/> (accessed 18/9/2014).

<sup>139</sup> To consult the proposals: <http://www.regionalisationavancee.ma/> (accessed 18/9/2014).

<sup>140</sup> Most of the documents submitted suggested the establishment of a direct electoral system to elect regional presidents and councils; an increase in the region’s executive and legislative powers; the creation and the abolition of specific regional institutions, such as establishing an Observatory for regionalisation in which representatives of civil society would be present and the elimination of the Wali or the regional governor; and the modification of the regional financial system and budget system, in order to allow the regions to have more control over their resources.

<sup>141</sup> A significant number of proposals exalted the need to redefine the powers and competencies of certain authorities, such as the Wali, the establishment of new channels of communication and coordination between the central government and the regions, as well as the modification of the territorial representation system within state organs and institutions.

<sup>142</sup> Concerning the regional boundaries, a significant number of proposals argued that the regionalisation process could be the basis for promoting the country’s cultural diversity and Moroccan plurality. Regarding the Western Sahara, only a very few political parties, such as the Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM), Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS) and Unified Socialist Party (PSU) addressed the issue proposing the creation of an asymmetric territorial model, with different levels of regionalisation and a special status for the territory in conflict.

autonomous initiatives were motivated by a refusal to participate in the consultative sessions organised by the CCR, considered to be an expression of the top-down nature of political reforms in the country. Public attention to the reform decreased, however, as uprisings erupted in North Africa and spread to Morocco.

### **Assessing the advanced regionalisation project: improvements and inertias**

The regional system proposed in the advanced project is an example of the complexity of Moroccan politics, insofar as improvements to previous regional models coexist with certain constants, with the consequence of preserving the political dynamics and values of the Moroccan political system.

According to the king's speeches, the 'advanced regionalisation' reform does not respond to any ethnic, cultural or confessional pressures. Instead, it is a step in the trajectory of state consolidation, which is a continuum, through decentralisation and local democracy. This is quite evident in the final project drafted by the CCR and made public in February 2011 as required by the king. It is both very detailed and of very broad scope, and it can easily be accessed through the Internet.<sup>143</sup> The accessibility of the final project somehow contrasts with the fact that the commission, like many other institutions working on key political issues in Morocco, emerged through the king's 'goodwill,' distant from any representative principles or control exerted by elected Moroccan institutions.<sup>144</sup>

In this section we assess the changes and the continuities of the advanced regionalisation project, following two main criteria: first, we examine the official objectives declared in the project and second, the degree of autonomy this new version of the project grants to the regions. In order to assess them, we contrast the latest project against the previous regional models, as outlined in the 1996 constitutional reform and the 1997 regional law.

---

<sup>143</sup> See: <http://www.regionalisationavancee.ma/> (accessed 18/9/2014).

<sup>144</sup> Mohammed Tozy, 'Islamists, technocrats, and the palace,' *Journal of democracy* 19, 1 (2008): 34-41.



### *Changes introduced by the project of advanced regionalisation*

In order to analyse the changes introduced by the advanced regionalisation project and its persisting continuities, six issues are examined: the democratisation of the regions; the amount of power transferred to the regions; human and fiscal resources, with a specific focus on the local fiscal system and interregional solidarity; good governance and agencification; the scope of control exerted by the Ministry of Interior; and regional border divisions.

Three crucial aspects in democratising the regions are the electoral system, the status of the members of regional parliaments and the executive power of the president of the regional council. The novelties introduced pave the way to democratising regional institutions because they aim to foster consideration for the demands raised by local and territorial constituencies. As for the regional electoral system, elections are direct universal suffrage with proportional formula. The project rules that, beyond elected members, national MPs selected from the regional constituency, the president of the regional chamber of commerce and trade union members can also attend the sessions of the regional parliament as consultants.<sup>145</sup> The president of the regional council cannot be a member of the national Parliament at the same time, in contrast with the 1997 regional model.<sup>146</sup> The new constitutional reform, approved in the referendum in July 2011, requires that at least three-fifths of the total number of regional MPs must attend for a parliamentary session to be considered valid. Finally, the new project provides the president of the regional council with the necessary power to implement the

---

<sup>145</sup> The broader attendance to regional parliaments responds to EU's requirements and establishes links between regional and central institutions.

<sup>146</sup> "Rapport sur la régionalisation avancée" (RRA), Book I, 12 (2011). Available at: <http://www.regionalisationavancee.ma/PageFR.aspx?id=8> (accessed 18/9/2014).

council's decisions, withdrawing this from the Wali.<sup>147</sup> These measures coincide with one of the traditional demands of local representatives.<sup>148</sup>

The regional model proposed in the project also affects other territorial entities, such as prefectures and provinces, reframing the territorial structure of power. In this regard, despite increasing the responsibility of prefectures and provinces<sup>149</sup> and establishing a non-hierarchical relationship between various territorial entities, the role of the regional council will be predominant in issues related to regional development.<sup>150</sup> In particular, it is up to the region to propose urban and rural development plans as well as plans organising territory.

The fiscal system is considered a key sector in determining the success of the decentralisation process. The project of advanced regionalisation opens with a plea for optimisation of financial resources, and forecasts the creation of new regional tax authorities. The goal is not to increase the tax burden (currently at 26 per cent in Morocco), but rather to ensure that payment falls on *the users* of the large infrastructures (such as airports or large train stations). The regional council can obtain loans only from the Municipal Equipment Fund (which also counts private banks among its members), the organisation funding territorial entities.<sup>151</sup> The commission thus ruled that regions obtaining important financial resources from the fund will be responsible for the management of their own regional issues. It is worth emphasising that the financial power of the regions has historically been very weak.<sup>152</sup>

---

<sup>147</sup> The Walis have the same powers than governors at the provincial level, as they represent state authority in the territory. Sylvia Bergh examined the power of governors over local governments, after various liberalisation processes took place in Morocco. See: Sylvia Bergh, 'Inclusive Neoliberalism, Local Governance Reforms and the Redeployment of State power,' cit.

<sup>148</sup> Royaume du Maroc-Ministère De L'Intérieur, *La déconcentration corollaire de la décentralisation*, VIIème Colloque National des Collectivités Locales (Rabat : Ministère de l'Intérieur, 1998).

<sup>149</sup> In order to improve deconcentration, prefectures and provinces will drive inter-municipality projects and will implement regional programs. RRA, Book II, 29 (2011).

<sup>150</sup> RRA, Book I, 15 (2011).

<sup>151</sup> RRA, Book I, 18 (2011).

<sup>152</sup> In 2009, the state funding transferred to local entities was distributed in the following way: 49 per cent went to urban areas, 25 per cent to the rural communities, 19 per cent to the provinces and prefectures, and only 7 per cent to the regions. These data demonstrate the state's effort to control and integrate the areas perceived as more problematic, namely urban areas.

Finally, the advanced regionalisation project seeks to improve public management. For this purpose it proposes the creation of an agency under the control of the regional council, responsible for supporting investment projects from a technical point of view. This agency, the Regional Projects Agency, will be a legal organism with financial and management autonomy.<sup>153</sup> Therefore, the new tendencies in public management include a step further towards 'the hollowing out of the state,'<sup>154</sup> with the option of 'emptying the content and action of public administrations,' always under the presumption of inefficiency, and the creation of other ad hoc bodies. Ideally, the agencification of public management offers a series of advantages, such as the reduction of bureaucratic inertia. However, it also has risks. It can indeed lead to a duplication of structures and to overlapping responsibilities, thus paradoxically leading to further bureaucratisation. Moreover, it can also help strengthen clientelistic networks, therefore representing a threat to democratic accountability.

### *Continuities*

The project has remained within the borders of what the king would accept, and has tried not to jeopardise his authority. Ideally, it will pave the way to modernisation and decentralisation, making possible the achievement of an effective change in power distribution. However, when it comes to implementation and political meaning, the project not only respects the 'red lines' drawn out in previous reforms but also further strengthens central authority and national unity. Enduring state guardianship and regional divisions are two examples of this continuity.

State guardianship has been present in the process of decentralisation since the 1996 constitutional reform. Indeed, despite statements claiming that state control would be reduced, the current project explicitly refers to the need for the central authority's a priori

---

<sup>153</sup> RRA, Book I, 20.

<sup>154</sup> Brinton Milward and Keith Provan, 'What does the "Hollow State" look like?,' in Barry Bozeman (ed.), *Public Management: State of the Art* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1993): 309-322.

approval of the regional council's agenda and the budget law. Approval and revisions of development plans also require the a priori approval of the central government.<sup>155</sup>

Among the debated aspects of this new regional system, the thorniest is regional borders and divisions.<sup>156</sup> The centrality of this issue is also pointed to in the project itself, but the CCR declared that it was 'faithful to the royal line,' and denied that regional traditions or political regionalism exist in Morocco.<sup>157</sup> Indeed, according to the project Morocco is characterised by a territorial structure that is 'unified and of a high level of integration under the aegis of a monarchy in symbiosis with its people.'<sup>158</sup> Therefore, 'advanced regions' seem to be a mere institutional and functional structure for the CCR, which also established the 'deontology' the regional entities have to respect: efficiency, homogeneity, functionality, accessibility and proximity, proportionality and balance.<sup>159</sup> Under these criteria, the number of regions falls from sixteen to twelve. In this context of reducing the number of regions and protecting centralism, the Western Sahara is included as part of the Moroccan state and divided into three sub-regions. The CCR has made huge efforts to justify and explain territorial divisions in general.<sup>160</sup> However, less effort has been devoted to explaining the council's criteria in splitting the Western Sahara.

Additional continuities with the previous regional model persist. This is the case for the lack of political power granted to the regions and the prohibition on establishing regional parties; the maintenance of state guardianship over regional councils; the integration of local elites in national political life; and the reaffirmation of Moroccan sovereignty on disputed territories, such as the Western Sahara.

---

<sup>155</sup> RRA, Book I, 23 (2011).

<sup>156</sup> Rousset, *Quelle autonomie pour quelle région? Le projet marocain de régionalisation: défis et perspectives*, (Paris: Association Maroc Développement, 2010): 4.

<sup>157</sup> RRA, Book I, 5, 7, 8 and 11 (2011).

<sup>158</sup> RRA, Book I, 31 (2011).

<sup>159</sup> RRA, Book I, 32 (2011).

<sup>160</sup> See, for instance, the long discussion and analysis of socio-economic and demographic data justifying territorial division: RRA, Book II, 127-200 (2011).

This examination of the advanced regionalisation project suggests that the reform achieves the objective of transforming the territorial administration and governance through the establishment of regions, but keeps the powers of the central state unchanged. At a broader level, it reinforces the position of the king as the main political actor deciding how, when and what kind of change can be produced.

### **The impact and controversies of the regionalisation project in contentious times**

The issue of territorial power-sharing forcefully emerged in other North African countries, beyond Morocco, after the 2011 uprisings started. This is for instance the case in Libya, where the leaders of the Cyrenaica region claimed their right to self-government and the establishment of a federal system.<sup>161</sup> In Morocco, the discussion over territorial power-sharing appeared before protests erupted. However, protests and the announcement of the creation of an Advisory Commission for Constitutional Reform (CCRC) captured the attention of political parties, organisations, institutions and citizens, who thus focused on issues such as the role of the monarchy, the separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary.<sup>162</sup> From that moment on, regionalisation and decentralisation became residual demands. Paradoxically, they remained relevant only for the king and for social and political groups from those areas where autonomist and regionalist demands are present, like in Northern Morocco and the Rif region. This is the case for Amazigh (Berber) activist groups and some far leftist parties.<sup>163</sup>

---

<sup>161</sup> Youssef Sawania and Jason Pack, 'Libyan constitutionality and sovereignty post-Qadhafi: the Islamist, regionalist, and Amazigh challenges,' *The Journal of North African Studies* 18, 4 (2013): 523-543.

<sup>162</sup> Inmculada Szmolka, '¿La quinta ola de democratización? Cambio político sin cambio de régimen en los países árabes?', *Política y sociedad* 50, 2 (2013): 893- 935; Vincent Durac, 'Protest movements and political change: an analysis of the "Arab uprisings" of 2011,' *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 31, 2 (2013): 175-193.

<sup>163</sup> Angela Suárez Collado, *El movimiento amazigh en el Rif: identidad, cultura y política en las provincias de Nador y Alhucemas* (PhD dissertation, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 2013); Bruce Maddy-

In the case of the Rif, since 2008 activist groups have been demanding further decentralisation and the establishment of a regional autonomous entity and a federal system in Morocco.<sup>164</sup> After the publication of the final report by the CCR, these groups have continued debating regionalisation and the final project. In the meantime, protests and demonstrations with a strong autonomist nature have become more and more frequent, encouraged by the contentious environment of the broader region and by the disillusion caused by the CCR's final report.<sup>165</sup>

In fact, the final CCR proposal met with a number of criticisms from Rif-based activists in relation to two main aspects: territorial delimitation and the non-legalisation of regional parties. Regarding the first issue, the CCR divides the north of Morocco into two different regions. This separation clashes with the territorial conception that the Rif autonomist movement argues for.<sup>166</sup> Secondly, the non-legalisation of regional parties has been a major criticism of the project, as certain groups, like the Movement for the Autonomy of Rif (MAR), have been struggling for their legalisation for years. To challenge this prohibition, the creation of the so-called Rif Party for Solidarity was announced in April 2011.<sup>167</sup>

In addition, since October 2011, when a revolt took place in AitBouayach (Al Hoceima province), generating a cycle of local repression and contestation, symbols that directly question the Moroccan political and territorial system, such as the ancient flag of the Republic

---

Weitzman, 'Arabization and Its Discontents: The Rise of the Amazigh Movement in North Africa,' *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 3, 2 (2012): 109-135.

<sup>164</sup> Among them are some local sections of national parties, trade unions and human right associations such as Annahj Addimocrati, the Moroccan Workers' Union and the Moroccan Association of Human Rights, the majority of Amazigh associations in the Rif, local associations focused on culture, development, and regional memory, and other non-legal groups such as Movement for the Autonomy of Rif (MAR) and Northern Morocco Forum for Human Rights.

<sup>165</sup> This observation is one of the results of our fieldwork in the region.

<sup>166</sup> Some groups claim the 'Great Rif,' which covers Northern Morocco, from the Atlantic coast to the Algerian border, and from the Mediterranean coast to the Rif Mountains, while others claim the territory formed by the provinces of Al Hoceima and Nador along with certain parts of Taza and Berkane, a territory based exclusively on linguistic criteria.

<sup>167</sup> Fieldwork observation.

of the Rif, have increasingly been carried by young protestors.<sup>168</sup> This is done to express not only their commitment to the ‘autonomist cause’, but also their dissatisfaction with the soft reforms adopted by the state, which are considered insufficient and superficial.<sup>169</sup>

The scant public attention<sup>170</sup> given to the regionalisation project after 2011 protests and constitutional reform suggests that it was not a priority for the main institutional actors, except for the king. The delay in approving the regionalisation law demonstrates that neither the current government (which has been in power since November 2011) nor the main political parties have made effort to accelerate its implementation.<sup>171</sup> This three-year period of deficient institutional interest has been counterbalanced by the king, who in January 2013 recovered the regionalisation process by ordering the Economic, Social and Environmental Commission (ESEC) to facilitate the realisation and implementation of advanced regionalisation in the ‘southern provinces’, as Morocco calls Western Sahara.<sup>172</sup> Following the royal order, the ESEC issued a report, the ‘New Development Model for the Southern Provinces’,<sup>173</sup> which does not introduce any substantial change to the original project or the 2011 constitutional regulations regarding regional reform. Indeed, it mainly focuses on how to achieve greater economic development, respecting the distribution of competences, conditions and terms outlined in the advanced regionalisation project and the 2011 constitution. The report thus seems to be one step further in the state’s strategy of merely normalising the Western Sahara situation, with no political solution in sight, despite internal

---

<sup>168</sup> Fieldwork and participant observation in the region.

<sup>169</sup> This observation is one of the results of our fieldwork in the region.

<sup>170</sup> “Le rapport de la commission Azziman sur la régionalisation porté disparu”, *Libération* 29/5/2014, [http://www.libe.ma/Le-rapport-de-la-commission-Azziman-sur-la-regionalisation-porte-disparu\\_a50672.html](http://www.libe.ma/Le-rapport-de-la-commission-Azziman-sur-la-regionalisation-porte-disparu_a50672.html) (accessed 18/9/2014).

<sup>171</sup> Upcoming general elections are however pressurising actors to take action. The government has indeed sent the draft law to political parties on the 19th June 2014. Parties formulated their amendments by the 19th July 2014.

<sup>172</sup> Ottawa, “Morocco: “Advanced decentralization” meets the Sahara Autonomy Initiative”, cit.

<sup>173</sup> Regional Development Model for the Southern Provinces. Concept Note, December 2012. Available at <http://www.ces.ma/Pages/Accueil.aspx> (accessed 18/9/2014).

and external pressure. It is no coincidence that the advanced regionalisation project does not consider the international border, the territorial division demanded by the Sahrawi, or the social, economic and labour related issues of the Non-autonomous Territory of Western Sahara.<sup>174</sup> On the contrary, state control over the population and repression of certain political actors, such as human rights associations, has risen.

## Conclusion

The regionalisation project, initially exalted as the greatest reform of the decade in Morocco, was ironically relegated to a minor position by social protest and political contestation demanding change, as increasing territorial autonomy was not included among the demands of the rebellious street.

Despite some improvements in electoral procedures and representation quota, the advanced regionalisation project highlights the Moroccan authoritarian state's fear of carrying out an actual decentralisation and transferring political functions to regional entities, which might claim rights to cultural, linguistic and historical diversity. In the frame of an unstable North African context, the Moroccan state reacted by continuing with its Lampedusian style of change, establishing commissions and initiating reforms to meet social demands, while real change is only given in homeopathic doses.<sup>175</sup> The advanced regionalisation project was developed in an authoritarian context by a commission with no democratic legitimacy. Two years after the presentation of the project and its constitutional incorporation in 2011, the regional model is still in the king's political laboratory, as yet not implemented. The king's

---

<sup>174</sup> Anna Theofilopoulou, 'Morocco's new constitution and the Western Sahara conflict. A missed opportunity?,' *The Journal of North African Studies* 17, 4 (2012): 687-696. The Moroccan policies in the Western Sahara have produced deep inequalities within the population. In 2010, the people living in the camp of Gdeimzik demanded the end of inequality between Sahrawi and Moroccan people living in the Western Sahara.

<sup>175</sup> See: Florian Kohstall, 'From reform to resistance: Universities and student mobilisation in Egypt and Morocco before and after the Arab Uprisings,' *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, 1 (2015).



philosophy of small steps, waiting for the right moment to introduce reforms, may explain this delay. If not, it results from the Moroccan tradition of undertaking long-standing reform processes that allow the monarchy to remain the central actor promoting and capitalising on reforms and controlled political change.

In sum, the project contains some innovations which constitute a change and even an improvement when contrasted with previous iterations, such as direct election of all members of the regional council, the implementation of decisions by the president of the regional council, and new channels for citizen participation. Yet there has been no motion towards more economic and political autonomy for the regions, whereby regional councils would be able to collect taxes and reduce state guardianship. The advanced regionalisation project strengthens the process of decentralisation and deconcentration but does not complete it. It is not the first time that regional reform and decentralisation has been used in official discourse to renovate state legitimacy. The monarch designed the regional reform and benefitted from the limited changes it introduces, allowing other state and social actors to be involved in the process but only as consultants. The continuity in the regional reform is reflected in the respect for the red lines established by the king, evident in the limited transfer of power to the regions, non-recognition of cultural particularism, and the maintenance of the unitary system and integrity of the national territory.

## **Acknowledgements**

The authors would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments. They would also like to thank Paola Rivetti and Rosita Di Peri for their comments, suggestions and support. Nevertheless, any errors and misjudgements remain the responsibility of the authors.

# **From reform to resistance: Universities and student mobilisation in Egypt and Morocco before and after the Arab Uprisings**

FLORIAN KOHSTALL<sup>176</sup>

*ABSTRACT University students have played a pivotal role in the Arab uprisings in 2011. This article explores the link between reform policies and social mobilisation through a comparison of university reforms and student protests in Egypt and Morocco. It argues that both – the fabrication of social policies and the formation of protest – are rooted in the specific political configuration of authoritarian regimes. Egypt and Morocco have both embarked on internationalising higher education. But the monarchy was more successful in embracing change through a more pluralistic type of governance. Hence, Morocco could so far escape the disruptive dynamics of the uprising, unlike Egypt, which was more reluctant to establish a new type of governance.*

## **Introduction**

When Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak had to step down in February 2011 after 18 days of popular protest, university presidents announced that state security guards would be removed from campuses. This was only one step towards meeting student demands, an attempt to avoid street protests spilling over into campuses. Once President Muhammad Mursi was removed from power

---

<sup>176</sup> Freie Universität Berlin Cairo Office. Email: [florian.kohstall@fu-berlin.de](mailto:florian.kohstall@fu-berlin.de)

in July 2013, university presidents demanded that their own security guards be authorised to arrest students on campus. While in 2011 higher education was one of the first sectors to embrace a wider policy of liberalisation, it was the first to adopt the new security regime put in place by the military two years later.

This article argues that higher education is an instructive sector to observe the dynamics of change and continuity in the wake of the Arab uprisings. A comparison between university reforms in Egypt and Morocco will provide us with a better understanding of how different regimes adjusted to domestic and international pressure and how they succeeded or failed to limit the scale of protest. Like Tunisia, the Egyptian ‘republic’ underwent sweeping changes through the uprising. While the military institution tried to guarantee the continuity of the regime, a popular uprising that only lasted for eighteen days managed to remove Mubarak from office. In Morocco the outcome of the 2011 protest cycle was limited to constitutional reform and anticipated elections that left the reins of power and the prerogatives of the monarchical institution largely untouched. These very different outcomes and the scale of the uprisings raise the question of how these regimes administer reform and how they tame resistance to it.

While many observers have emphasised rising social inequalities and grievances as triggers of mass protest,<sup>177</sup> the question of why regimes with similar socioeconomic backgrounds are more or less vulnerable to social discontent is yet to be described. A comparison of higher education reform alone will not explain why Egypt and Morocco have been differently affected by waves of protests, but it can illustrate how two authoritarian regimes rely on different forms of governance and how this relates to different forms of resistance. Scholars of Middle Eastern politics have often dismissed reforms as window dressing<sup>178</sup> or deplored their absence.<sup>179</sup> Yet North African regimes have

---

<sup>177</sup> Robert Springborg, ‘The Precarious Economics of Arab Springs,’ *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 53, 6 (2011): 85-104.

<sup>178</sup> Holger Albrecht and Oliver Schlumberger, “‘Waiting for Godot’: Regime Change without Democratization in the Middle East,” *International Political Science Review* 25, 4 (2004): 371-392.

constantly tried to adapt to social changes through reforms, even before the uprising. While higher education systems in these countries are plagued by overcrowding and low quality, they have not resisted the worldwide trend towards internationalisation, especially when it comes to using international examples for university reform.<sup>180</sup> This illustrates how authoritarian regimes, despite their apparent stability and inertia, have proved relatively flexible in adapting to specific features of the global economy.

As Paola Rivetti shows in the introduction to this issue, change and stability in Middle Eastern and North African countries have often been investigated either through theoretical approaches on democratisation, or studies on authoritarian regime stability.<sup>181</sup> Within the frame of these approaches, analyses of sector policies have largely concentrated on the missing link between economic and political liberalisation. Reforms inspired by the Washington Consensus did not necessarily contribute to the emergence of a new middle class asking for political liberties, but rather to ‘networks of privilege’<sup>182</sup> and ‘crony capitalists’<sup>183</sup> on the one hand, and increasing restrictions on freedom and modes of demobilisation on the other.<sup>184</sup> These studies, despite their

---

<sup>179</sup> This is especially true for international donor organisations like the World Bank. See: World Bank (ed.), *The Road not travelled: Education Reform in the Middle East and North Africa*, Mena Development Report (Washington D.C.: The World Bank, 2008).

<sup>180</sup> The word ‘internationalisation’ has many different applications, from student mobility to joint teaching programs. Here I refer to internationalisation as a convergence of reform agendas in countries with very different higher education systems and the transfer of reform receipts from one country to the other. See: Johnston D. Bruce, *Worldwide Reforms in the Financing and Management of Higher Education* (Boston: The International Comparative Higher Education Finance and Accessibility Project, 1998).

<sup>181</sup> See: Paola Rivetti, ‘Continuity and change before and after the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco. Regime reconfiguration and policy-making in North Africa’, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, 1 (2015).

<sup>182</sup> Steven Heydemann (ed.), *Networks of Privilege in the Middle East: The Politics of Economic Reform Revisited* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Press, 2004).

<sup>183</sup> Hamouda Chekir and Ishac Diwan, ‘Crony Capitalism in Egypt,’ Working Paper no. 250, Center for International Development at Harvard University (CID), (2012).

<sup>184</sup> Eberhard Kienle, *A Grand Delusion: Democracy and Economic Reform in Egypt* (London: IB Tauris, 2001).

important contributions to the discipline, tend to pay little attention to the resistance against these reforms and the unintended consequences they might produce in different political contexts.<sup>185</sup>

This article argues for a more careful assessment of reform policies and protests. The question is not about the absence or ineffectiveness of reforms, but about the way reforms are designed and implemented.<sup>186</sup> As Tocqueville put it, ‘the most dangerous moment for a government is when it starts to reform’.<sup>187</sup> Change in policy-making risks becoming a major cause of discontent. Still, the question is not about reform *per se*, but about specific ways these reforms are carried out. Even if their effect in terms of policy outcome may be low, processes of policy-making allow us to observe certain changes, such as how regimes build new coalitions or reinforce ties with certain constituencies and marginalise others. If reforms do not immediately trigger unrest and uprisings, they can still spread the seeds.

By taking higher education policy and student protests as an example, I contrast how Egypt and Morocco have decided upon and implemented specific reform policies and how the public has reacted to these reforms since the end of the 1990s. My approach is informed by the study of public policy, a very popular approach in ‘Western’ political science that has however been widely neglected in Middle Eastern Studies.<sup>188</sup> In recent years policy-making has become one of the most useful areas to question the classic distinction between democratic and autocratic regimes. In both regime types the realm of *politics*—competition for power—has been challenged by the emergence of new movements and new forms of mobilisation. At the same time the realm of *policies*—the

---

<sup>185</sup> On the unintended consequences of neo-liberal reform though with a rather normative connotation on the effect on democratisation: Paul Aarts and Francesco Cavatorta (eds.), *Civil Society in Syria and Iran: Activism in Authoritarian Contexts* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2013).

<sup>186</sup> For a similar approach though more concentrated on macro-economic reforms see: Nadine Mourad Sika, ‘Dynamics of Development and Uprisings in the Arab World,’ *Mediterranean Quarterly* 24, 4 (2013): 43-67.

<sup>187</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *L’Ancien Régime et la Révolution* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), 171-172.

<sup>188</sup> Aude Signoles, ‘Réforme de l’Etat et transformation de l’action publique. Approche par les politiques publiques’, in Elizabeth Picard (ed.), *La politique dans le monde arabe* (Paris: Armin Colin, 2006), 239-261; Florian Kohstall, *Coopération internationale et consolidation autoritaire: Les réformes de l’enseignement supérieur. Le cas de l’Égypte et du Maroc*, Doctoral Thesis (Aix-en-Provence and Berlin: Université Aix Marseille III and Freie Universität Berlin, 2009), [http://www.diss.fu-berlin.de/diss/receive/FUDISS\\_thesis\\_000000036138](http://www.diss.fu-berlin.de/diss/receive/FUDISS_thesis_000000036138) (accessed 16/9/2014)..

distribution of public resources—has witnessed new types of governance through the establishment of specific policy forums, the selection of specific ‘stakeholders,’ the role of experts, and decision-making on multiple levels, from local to international.<sup>189</sup> New forms of governance have contributed to blur the boundaries between democratic and authoritarian regimes.<sup>190</sup> And while there is no direct cause-effect relation between reform and resistance, changes in policy-making and dynamics in social mobilisation are often linked to each other.<sup>191</sup> Through the analysis of a specific policy sector, this article aims to closely explore these links and understand how change in a policy sector affects regime stability.

Comparisons between Morocco and Egypt have a prominent place in Middle Eastern studies. Numerous authors have emphasised the greater reform flexibility of monarchies compared to republics.<sup>192</sup> This article demonstrates that this reform flexibility is also grounded in specific types of governance each regime has established in the past decade. It starts with an assessment of the role of students in Egypt’s 25 January uprising to understand how a specific sector became a mobiliser for revolt. The first section is dedicated to Egypt only, due to the prominent role that Egyptian students played in Mubarak’s removal and the visibility they have gained through the uprising. The second and third sections contrast approaches to reform in higher education in Egypt and Morocco since the end of the 1990s. The fourth section demonstrates how change in higher education is related to a specific political configuration and how this configuration shapes the evolution of reform and protest pre- and post-2011.

---

<sup>189</sup> Michel Camau and Gilles Massardier (eds.), *Démocraties et autoritarismes. Fragmentation et hybridation des régimes* (Paris: Karthala, 2009).

<sup>190</sup> Francesco Cavatorta, ‘The convergence of governance. Upgrading authoritarianism in the Arab world and downgrading democracy elsewhere?’, *Middle East Critique* 19, 3 (2010): 217-232.

<sup>191</sup> Michel Dobry, *Sociologie des crises politiques: La dynamique des mobilisations multi-sectorielles* (Paris: Presses de Science Po, 2009).

<sup>192</sup> Clement Henry and Robert Springborg, *Globalization and the Politics of Development in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); F. Gregory Gause III, ‘Kings for All Seasons: How the Middle East’s Monarchies Survived the Arab Spring’, Analysis Paper (Doha: Brookings Doha Center, 24/9/2013).

The study builds on a long-term observation of university reforms in both countries, mainly between 1998 and 2006. I have conducted numerous interviews with stakeholders and examined official documents in order to understand how these reforms have been prepared and implemented with the support of international organisations. In particular, I have studied the composition and working method of reform commissions that Egypt and Morocco set up to comply with the political conditionality of good governance demanded by the World Bank (WB). In addition, in 2011 I began conducting numerous conversations with student representatives and professors in Egypt that have provided me with insights into their participation in different cycles of protest.

### **Student protest in Egypt: From pockets of resistance to multi-sectorial uprising**

It is widely accepted that the young were the decisive ingredient in the 2011 uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. This attributes an important role to students and graduates.<sup>193</sup> However, it is difficult to identify them as an isolated group among the masses that took to the streets between 25 January and 11 February. The 18 days of the uprising can be seen as a multi-sectorial mobilisation:<sup>194</sup> members of very different sectors of society went to the streets to protest against Mubarak's authoritarian rule. Workers and professionals also had important roles. While these groups often organised separate marches from workplaces or syndicates, they quickly joined the general demands and slogans ('Bread, freedom and social justice'), instead of formulating specific agendas. Students

---

<sup>193</sup> Michael Hoffmann and Amaney Jamal, 'The Youth and the Arab Spring: Cohort Differences and Similarities,' *Middle East Law and Governance* 4 (2012): 168-188.

<sup>194</sup> Dobry, *Sociologie des crises politiques*, cit.; on the Egyptian case: Marie Vannetzel, 'L'émergence d'une mobilisation multisectorielle en Égypte: des prémisses contextuelles au basculement situationnel,' Working Paper (Paris: Sciences Po, CERI, 2011).

often went to protests as ‘friends’, not as a homogenous protest group.<sup>195</sup> Merging into the general protest and overcoming specific demands helped to make the uprising successful.<sup>196</sup>

It is important to note the multi-sectorial nature of the uprising, not only to avoid overestimating the role of students, but also to understand how different student groups overcame the many cleavages that usually kept them apart (socially and politically). Mobilisation was not limited to specific political groups or to students from state universities. Students from the relatively recently-created private universities, who mostly come from wealthy households, joined the protest in large numbers. While their families counted among the beneficiaries of Mubarak’s liberalisation policy, their privileged status did not prevent them rebelling against the regime. On the contrary, the huge gap between the Western-style education they received at the American University in Cairo (AUC) or German University in Cairo (GUC), and the often archaic type of politics promoted by the regime (a characteristic that became visible in 2010 with the fraudulent parliamentary elections and the regime’s reaction to the Alexandria church bombing in 2011), seemed an important catalyst for protest.<sup>197</sup>

Despite the rather unexpected nature of the uprising and the fact that students were not the only group that made it succeed, it is possible to track student mobilisation back to the development of higher education in Egypt. Until the end of the 1970s political factions of Islamists, communists and Nasserists were very active on campus. But in 1979 President Sadat limited the participation of students and professors in inner-university decision-making circles and dissolved the National Student Union (NSU). In each university, student unions continued to exist, but Sadat’s successor, Mubarak, put university elections under judicial supervision and reinforced the prerogatives of

---

<sup>195</sup> Interview of the author with student representatives of Ain Shams University (Cairo, 2012).

<sup>196</sup> Mona El-Gobashy, ‘The Praxis of the Egyptian Revolution,’ *Middle East Report and information Project (MERIP)* 258, 41 (2011).

<sup>197</sup> Florian Kohstall, ‘Die ägyptische Revolution als Generationenkonflikt: Studierende und Professoren auf dem Tahrir-Platz und in den Universitäten,’ in Holger Albrecht and Thomas Demmelhuber (eds.), *Revolution und Regimewandel in Ägypten* (Baden-Baden, NOMOS, 2013): 185-208.



security forces on campuses in an attempt to curtail Islamist forces.<sup>198</sup> Thus student activism evolved in alternative forms of organisation outside the formal politics of student representation. From the 2000s, student mobilisations concentrated mainly on foreign policy issues like the third Iraq war or the second Palestinian Intifada. These events contributed to a reinvigoration of student groups, as well as to the emergence of *Kifaya*, Egypt's most impactful protest movement during the 2000s.<sup>199</sup> In March 2005, when Mubarak announced competitive presidential elections for the first time, a new group of professors was formed, called the '9 March Movement'. Its establishment marked the emergence of a new wave of professor and student activism, which started to address university-related issues. The 9 March Movement mobilised against specific measures of the Higher Education Enhancement Program (HEEP), the government's reform plan for public universities. In addition, important advocacy groups like the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE) successfully challenged university administrations with legal cases against the exclusion of politically active students and the presence of state security guards on campus.<sup>200</sup> At least since 2005 the university developed in one of the *loci* of protest culture under Mubarak. Both higher education reform and student protest cannot be identified as a direct cause of the 2011 uprising, but they prepared the university for it. When various organisations called for protest on 25 January, students and professors quickly responded. Beside the 6 April Movement, –a key organisation behind the uprising that was also very well represented on campus – the 9 March Movement was among the first groups to join the protests. Many protest marches on 25 and 28 January started in front of university gates before joining the masses in Tahrir.<sup>201</sup>

---

<sup>198</sup> Iman Farag, 'L'Université égyptienne: enjeux de modes de mobilisation,' *Monde arabe Maghreb-Machrek*, 127 (1992): 65-83.

<sup>199</sup> Frédéric Vairel, 'Protesting in Authoritarian Situations: Egypt and Morocco on Comparative Perspectives,' in Joel Beinin and Frédéric Vairel (eds.), *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011): 27-42.

<sup>200</sup> Interview of the author with a representative of AFTE (Cairo 2013).

<sup>201</sup> Kohstall, 'Die ägyptische Revolution als Generationenkonflikt,' cit.

The mass student mobilisation during the uprising should therefore not be portrayed as a ‘sudden uprising’, but in continuity with contentious campus politics and in connection to the regime’s attempts to reform and control universities. The rupture between small-scale protest then and the large-scale mobilisation during the 18 days consists in a qualitative change in the protest itself. While protest had previously existed in pockets of resistance and only occasionally spilled out of campuses, after 25 January it reached far beyond them and quickly united with other sectors of society. On the one hand the students’ role in the uprising was built on accumulated protest capital: through campus activism, students had already gained important protest experience. This became crucial to sustain the large-scale mobilisation. Many of the more passive students and professors quickly joined the masses once they witnessed the first success of the uprising. On the other hand, by joining other groups, students could push their mobilisation beyond the campus and their demands far beyond university. As a consequence, they could at least temporarily have a real impact on the evolution of higher education. The overthrow of Mubarak opened a new window for academic freedom, an issue that had been neglected in his higher education reform policies.

Once Mubarak was toppled, protests mainly revolved around demands to remove senior university officials such as deans and presidents.<sup>202</sup> At the privately owned GUC, students asked for the right to establish their own student union. AUC students demanded a reduction in tuition fees and insights into the university’s budget. One main achievement, however, was the revival of the NSU, the organisation banned by Sadat in the late 1970s. Freshly elected student representatives from all Egyptian universities re-established the NSU in August 2011, and started to draft a proposal for a new bylaw on student representation.<sup>203</sup> This was not adopted until Mursi came to

---

<sup>202</sup> At Cairo University, protests focused on the dismissal of the faculty of mass communication’s dean, whom the students accused of being a fervent defender of Mubarak’s regime. A leaflet circulating in Tahrir Square stated that the *pashas* and *beys* of the old regime should be removed from university administrations. ‘The Students of Revolutionary Egypt’, *Revolutionary Egypt* 2 (2011), 3. <http://www.tahrirdocuments.org>. (accessed 16/9/2014).

<sup>203</sup> David Matthews, ‘Revolutionary Road’, *Times Higher Education*, 20/4/2012. <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/419736.article>, (accessed 27/8/2014).

power. Consequently, students close to the Muslim Brotherhood who won the student elections in 2012 controlled its final draft. Still, in 2011, straight after the uprising, the main demands concentrated on greater participation and reactivating the open student politics that had characterised the university system until the late 1970s.

The multi-sectorial uprising that spread from streets to campuses also quickly contributed to a change in the strategy of certain university elites that were for a long time the gatekeepers of the regime's higher education policy. Shortly after Mubarak stepped down, university presidents decided to remove state security guards from campuses,<sup>204</sup> announced free elections for student bodies, and eradicated symbols, such as name plaques, associated with the old regime. These moves, although tentative, show a common understanding between students and university leaders that crucial issues had been ignored in the higher education reforms of the decade before, despite their obviously very different motivations in reacting to the uprising. If university leaders successfully tried to maintain power through these concessions, their moves also illustrate how the regime quickly lost control over the university sector once it entered into a cycle of protest and 'political crisis.'<sup>205</sup>

### **Egypt's higher education reform: Privatised and piecemeal**

Having shown how students from different social backgrounds joined forces and how they could reach important concessions from university leaders, it is worth looking back at Egypt's higher education reform between 2000 and 2010. While there may be no direct link between higher education policy and the uprising, we can identify three factors that contributed to the emergence of pockets of resistance and the possible defection of university leaders. First, Egypt fostered the

---

<sup>204</sup> Already in 2010 a court decided that state security forces had to be banned from campus. But under Mubarak's rule the court decision was never implemented, as university presidents were not accorded the necessary means to replace them with university guards.

<sup>205</sup> Dobry, *Sociologie des crises politiques*, cit.

development of a parallel education system by authorising private universities. These universities undermined the regime's discourse on free and equal access to higher education and questioned the social contract that presented education as a driver for social mobility. Second, the government was too weak to set up a comprehensive framework for reform and provide an alternative vision to the pre-existing social contract. Third, given the corporatist nature of the state and its strong reliance on international support, it was not able to build a consensus for reform.

Since the mid-1990s, internationalisation emerged as both a driver and buzzword for reform in Egypt, jointly promoted by foreign funding agencies and domestic reform entrepreneurs. In 1999, in cooperation with the WB, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research organised an international symposium of university stakeholders. Foreign experts presented so-called best practice examples from various OECD and developing countries, and domestic experts were asked to develop a national reform strategy.<sup>206</sup> The event is a good example of how international experts inform policy-making in Egypt. The WB had already supported education reform on various levels through different projects and now considered preparing a loan for higher education. However, it first wanted a strong commitment on the part of Egypt's government to implement the reform through a comprehensive and participatory approach.<sup>207</sup>

In order to achieve this, the minister established a National Committee for Higher Education Reform, including 25 stakeholders from the university. Access to the decision-making process was very limited, however. The minister relied mainly on a team composed of engineering professors that had already worked together with the WB on a pilot project to reform the engineering faculties. He also called upon senior university officials, former ministers and powerful businessmen.

---

<sup>206</sup> Supreme Council of Universities (Egypt), ed., *Higher Education Enhancement Program – International Symposium*, 2 volumes (Cairo: Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 1999).

<sup>207</sup> See in particular: World Bank, *Higher Education: The Lessons of Experience* (Washington D.C.: The World Bank, 1994); World Bank, *Building Knowledge Societies: New challenges for Higher Education* (Washington D.C.: The World Bank, 2002).

Although the WB emphasised the participatory approach of this committee, the Egyptian government did not include members of opposition parties or grassroots organisations. Instead, the minister relied on sector elites and foreign experts to draw up the reform plan. The few representatives of student and professor syndicates were all closely linked to Mubarak's National Democratic Party (NDP).<sup>208</sup> Because of the government's direct control over these syndicates, they failed to channel the demands of university stakeholders in the process and gain support for unpopular reform measures.

Reforms that sprang from the internationalisation strategy were manifested in two ways: the establishment of private universities (so-called special universities or *gamaat khasat*) and the HEEP (Higher Education Enhancement Program) to reform state universities. In 1994 the Egyptian government had already promulgated a law that authorised the creation of private universities. In 1997 four universities were established through private funding for the first time. While professional syndicates refused to recognise the diplomas given by these institutions, businessmen received cheap land in Cairo's outskirts to establish new universities. International funding institutions showed interest in investing in this new market of higher education. After the first wave of 'Egyptian-owned private universities,' another wave of private universities built on foreign models emerged, including the GUC, *l'Université Française de l'Égypte* (UFE), Al-Ahram Canadian University and the British University in Egypt (BUE). Today, at least 22 universities operate as 'privately founded' compared to 18 state universities.<sup>209</sup> Most of them were created in the period between 2002 and 2010, in the framework of the neo-liberal reform boom boosted by Mubarak's son Gamal and his team.

---

<sup>208</sup> Kohstall, *Coopération internationale et consolidation autoritaire*, cit.

<sup>209</sup> See the list of Egyptian universities on the site of the governmental Research, Development and Innovation Programme (RDI): <http://www.rdi.eg.net/DocumentLibrary/Documents/Universities%20%20Institutions%20List.pdf> (accessed 27/8/2014).

While private universities mushroomed in the 2000s, the reform strategy for state universities, initiated at the aforementioned symposium, had little effect on improving higher education. Projects to increase university staff salaries and create a new legislative framework for universities were dropped, as both the government and the WB feared the financial burden and political controversy. Instead they focused on a grant-based approach that would create incentives instead of resistance, at least in the short-term. Faculty members could now apply for funding with projects aimed at designing new study programs, reorganising faculties' management and introducing new teaching technologies. This reform went relatively smoothly, but it had only limited effect on improving the system. Faculties that suffer less from overcrowding, such as engineering, science and medicine, tended to win stakes in the project, while the faculties of commerce, law and literature, that enrol 70 per cent of state university students, remained largely untouched. Reform became more controversial with a second project, aimed at establishing a National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAAE), built on the Anglo-Saxon accreditation model. Here, it was not clear how an 'independent body' could now monitor universities without having administrative, financial or pedagogical autonomy. The establishment of this national body fuelled the aforementioned 9 March Movement. While its protest could only postpone the establishment of the agency, a new university law presented in 2007 enabling universities to raise their own funding provoked wide resistance and was consequently never adopted.<sup>210</sup>

Egypt's higher education reform in the 2000s was thus characterised by the state's limited capacity to set up a framework to reform public universities, resulting in a very selective approach to introducing internationalisation. Not only was its inclusion of stakeholders limited, but it was also selective in reducing international reform receipts to purely technocratic measures, establishing an accreditation body without autonomy and adopting a grant-based approach with limited

---

<sup>210</sup> Iman Farag, 'Going International: The Politics of Educational Reform in Egypt', in André Mazawi and Ronald Sultana (eds.), *Education and the Arab World: Political Projects, Struggles and Geometries of Power* (London: Routledge: World Year Book of Education 2009): 283-299.

outreach. While the government integrated buzzwords such as ‘building centres of excellence’, ‘quality assurance’ and ‘ranking’ into its discourse, it did not grant state universities the autonomy to compete in the international higher education market. Security considerations, such as the control of students and professors on campus, and the very centralised governance of universities allowed only for very limited reform.

This selective approach to internationalisation opened up new pockets of resistance. It not only spread discontent among students and professors, but also weakened the trust of sector elites in the regime’s capacity to reform. Through a persisting discourse of reform only partially implemented, students and professors became aware of the contradictory nature of Egypt’s distorted version of internationalised higher education. It exacerbated conflict between those who wanted to introduce reform and those who feared for their privileges. In addition, the new market of private universities deepened the gap between public and private education. The reform process did not provide channels for those disappointed by the reform. The protest and resistance described above were thus closely linked to the changes affecting higher education in the lead up to the 2011 uprising.

### **Morocco: More comprehensive reform through extended pluralism**

The crisis of higher education and the trend towards internationalisation are not unique to Egypt. All North African countries, with the exception of Libya, have undertaken important steps to reform their universities. An outstanding example is Morocco, which has embarked on various reforms to become a close neighbour of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Comparing Morocco’s approach to higher education reform with the Egyptian experience helps us understand that it is not reform or change *per se* that contributes to student protest, but rather the way reform is operated. Compared to Egypt, Morocco’s higher education policy built on a different university system and

has not given priority to establishing private universities.<sup>211</sup> More importantly, however, it tried to integrate stakeholders into the decision-making process, putting in place a more comprehensive type of reform.

The origins of Morocco's current higher education reform can be traced back to the mid-1990s when King Hassan II tried to integrate the socialist opposition party into the government, shortly before his son Muhammad VI succeeded him in 1999. After assigning the leader of the socialist USFP (*Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires*) party, Abderrahmane Youssoufi, to government responsibilities, he announced the establishment of the Special Commission for Education and Training (COSEF). This commission was composed of senior officials from all political parties and professional syndicates as well as representatives of NGOs active in the education sector. The commission was meant to establish a national consensus on education policy, in particular on the most controversial issues, such as language and free education.<sup>212</sup> After four months of debate, the parties presented the Charter on Education and Training, intended to serve as a 'moral compass' for education policy regardless of which party would be in government.<sup>213</sup>

The decision-making process in Morocco differed significantly from that in Egypt as far as pluralism and representation was concerned. By integrating the country's most important political parties and syndicates, the palace could pretend to represent the diversity of Morocco's political landscape and, above all, integrate different political currents from leftist to Islamist into the political process. While the king closely monitored the commission proceedings, most political parties, syndicates and experts accepted the palace's tutelage. Through this type of inclusion into the policy process, the palace built a buffer for contentious politics. Powerful syndicates like the

---

<sup>211</sup> To date, *Al Akhawayn* is the only private university operating in Morocco. In contrast to Egypt, a division between elite and mass education is not new to Morocco due to the coexistence of state universities and special engineering and management schools built on the French model of *Grandes Écoles*.

<sup>212</sup> 'Lettre Royale de Feu Sa Majesté Hassan II du 8 mars 1999', in *Messages et extraits des discours royaux (Mars 1999-Septembre 2000)*, ed. Commission spéciale éducation/formation (COSEF), (Rabat: Kingdom of Morocco, 2000), 14-15.

<sup>213</sup> Author interview with the president of COSEF (Rabat, 2006).



National Syndicate for Higher Education (SNEsup) entered the realm of politics through participation in the COSEF and in exchange, they had to refrain from protest at least temporarily. Internal divisions plagued syndicates as a consequence. COSEF was also a mechanism of divide and rule in the king's hands.

In Morocco, the comprehensive approach of 'commission politics' has had tangible effects on policy outcomes. It enabled the palace to re-establish strong ties with sector elites. Unlike Egypt, where reform was introduced through financial incentives for the faculty, Morocco's university reform started through a change in universities' leadership. After all political parties approved a new university law in 2000, a new system for selecting university presidents and faculty deans was implemented. Faculty members suggested three candidates through elections, but the final selection of the candidate was left to the palace. Through this new selection process the palace affirmed its direct control over universities, all by making university presidents the main actors of the reform. While in Egypt the responsibility for reform rested mainly on the central government, meaning any resistance would be directed against it, in Morocco implicating university presidents could localise protest and thus make it easier to diffuse.<sup>214</sup>

A good example of how university reform under this new system worked is the introduction of the so-called LMD (Licence, Master, Doctorat) system in 2003.<sup>215</sup> This international model acted like a 'magic wand' for a reform that had long been debated. Since the approval of the new university law in 2000, the Ministry of Higher Education had set up several commissions and committees to discuss the establishment of a new pedagogical framework for universities. Different models were considered, but no consensus was reached. When the minister had to step down in 2002 an expert committee composed of university professors seized this opportunity to finalise the

---

<sup>214</sup> For the importance of decentralised governance, see: Steve Hess, 'From the Arab Spring to the Chinese Winter: The institutional sources of authoritarian vulnerability and resilience in Egypt, Tunisia, and China,' *International Political Science Review*, 34 (2013): 254-272.

<sup>215</sup> LMD is the French adaptation of the Bologna process aimed at introducing the Bachelor (*Licence*), Master and PhD (*Doctorat*) system to all European universities.

pedagogical reform draft, endorsing the LMD as the best solution. The new minister had no choice but to adopt it if he wanted to move forward with reform.<sup>216</sup> The introduction of LMD illustrated that civil society actors and sector elites called into these expert commissions were able to considerably impact on the policy reform, as long as the authority of the king remained untouched. The reform was presented as a necessity with no alternative to associating Morocco with the EHEA.<sup>217</sup> While the Egyptian government was accused by many academics and professors of relying heavily on the WB and bowing to international pressure, Morocco could diffuse such criticism relatively well.

This more comprehensive approach notwithstanding, Morocco's higher education reform was also very controversial. Many professors saw the LMD reform as a top-down decision they were forced to cope with. They felt disregarded by a reform that would not improve teaching conditions or student mobility between universities.<sup>218</sup> Lacking substantial investments in infrastructure and payments, the new degrees only served faculties suffering less from overcrowding and already benefiting from cooperation with European universities. However, protest against the reform remained sporadic and isolated. Before 2011, student protests took place in specific faculties and centred on corporatist demands such as tuition fees and the material conditions of students. After 2011 several initiatives emerged advocating for a comprehensive reform of the education system. But the National Union of Moroccan Students (UNEM), which once represented the large majority of Moroccan students, remained in a deadlock due to the conflict between Islamist and leftist factions. While students and graduates played an important role in the 2011 protests, UNEM could not gain ground through them. Students indeed participated in protests through channels not directly linked to the university. In sharp contrast with Egypt, the 2011 protests in Morocco remained more

---

<sup>216</sup> Author interview with a member of the expert committee (Aix-en-Provence, 2009).

<sup>217</sup> Abdelfettah Benchenna, 'L'appui de la France à la Réforme de l'Enseignement supérieur au Maroc: quelles finalités et quels enjeux?', *Journal of Higher Education in Africa/Revue de l'enseignement supérieur en Afrique* 7, 1-2 (2009): 121-140.

<sup>218</sup> Ahmed Ghouati, 'Réforme LMD au Maghreb: éléments pour un premier bilan politique et pédagogique,' *Journal of Higher Education in Africa/Revue de l'enseignement supérieur en Afrique* 7, 1-2 (2009): 61-77.

localised and more strongly grounded in political affiliations. While the 20 February movement successfully galvanised protest in Morocco after the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, it depended on the support of existing political parties and the NGOs. This factor inhibited the spill-over into a more lasting multi-sectorial uprising and made the movement more vulnerable to the palace's reform responses.<sup>219</sup>

Another factor that limited the scale of the protests that emerged out of universities was that many former student activists and professors critical of the regime had been co-opted through the aforementioned 'commission politics,' the regime's discourse on social policy reform and 'democratic transition' in the decade preceding the Arab uprisings. Various royal initiatives such as education reform and subsequent initiatives such as the reform of the personal status law and the vast operation of the National Initiative for Human Development integrated many professors and university leaders as experts into the realm of power.<sup>220</sup>

In conclusion, Morocco's higher education reform also opened up pockets of resistance. But the palace carefully established ties with sector elites during this process. Before confronting the university with change, the palace fabricated a consensus on the future directions of reform. It efficiently promoted a new university law and reorganised universities from the top through the selection of new presidents. Finally, it presented reform through the LMD system as an international constraint. By doing so it was successful in building a buffer against protest. In particular, the wide stakeholder participation in the reform process was important to spread responsibility for reform on multiple shoulders. In Morocco, reform kept university leaders, professors and students busy, while in Egypt it deepened the gap between reform-oriented faculty members and those resisting it.

---

<sup>219</sup> Ahmed Benchemsi, 'Feb20's Rise and Fall: A Moroccan Story,' Le Blog de Ahmed Benchemsi, 17/2/2013. <http://ahmedbenchemsi.com/feb20s-rise-and-fall-a-moroccan-story> (accessed 27/8/2014); Frédéric Vairel, ' "Qu'avez-vous fait de vos vingt ans?" Militantismes marocains du 23 mars (1965) au 20 février (2011),' *L'Année du Maghreb*, VIII (2012): 219-238.

<sup>220</sup> Vairel, 'Qu'avez-vous fait de vos vingt ans?,' cit.

## **Different types of governance and the continuity of specific political configurations**

Comparing Egypt's and Morocco's higher education reform shows that both countries have undertaken several steps to adjust universities to a global education market. But the comparison also reveals important contrasts in how the two regimes have prepared and implemented reforms. While Morocco chose a more inclusive decision-making process, Egypt's reform process remained piecemeal due to its limited capacity to integrate different stakeholders. Those contrasts are not unique to university reform: they illustrate the distinct types of governance the two regimes established prior to the uprisings.

In Morocco, the palace's flexibility in responding to popular demands with spectacular reforms remains the most important silencer of protest and the politics of commissions became the palace's favourite instrument for monitoring reforms. Other types of reform, such as the personal status law (*Mudawana*), were prepared under similar conditions.<sup>221</sup> The palace has repeatedly relied on this system, whereby representatives from political parties and the civil society are hand-picked by the king in order to administer change and expand the

‘...dense fabric of political ‘intermediaries’: actors inside and outside of the institutional sphere ... that serve as links between the centre of power and society: a buffer contributing to the consensual management of change and, in moments of crisis, helping to dilute responsibilities, absorb criticism or take the blows.’<sup>222</sup>

---

<sup>221</sup> Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, ‘Woman, Islam, and the Moroccan State: The Struggle over the Personal Status Law,’ *Middle East Journal* 59, 3 (2005): 394-410.

<sup>222</sup> Irene Fernández Molina, ‘The Monarchy vs. the 20 February Movement: Who holds the Reins of Political Change in Morocco?,’ *Mediterranean Politics* 16, 3 (2011): 435-441, 436.

To tame the 20 February protest in 2011, the king established the Consultative Commission for the Reform of the Constitution that prepared the constitutional changes adopted via referendum in June 2011. Moreover, he accelerated the establishment of the Economic and Social Council, reactivated the National Initiative for Human Development, and granted more independence to the National Council on Human Rights. In combination with anticipated parliamentary elections and the subsequent change in government—entrusted for the first time to the Islamist Justice and Development Party leader Abdelilah Benkirane—this strategy effectively weakened the 2011 protests.<sup>223</sup> Morocco's education reform started with a similar move, when the current King's father, Hassan II, gave the socialist USFP leader government responsibility. Only one year later the king created COSEF, presenting himself as the only reform champion in the country. Thus, in reacting to the 2011 protests, Mohamed VI deployed a 'governance toolkit' that had already proved successful under the rule of his father and was even improved during the past decade.

This type of governance builds on a unique type of pluralism, one of political parties and civil society organisations beneath the supremacy of the king. It enables the palace to present itself as the agenda-setter of reform and to constantly re-establish ties with political and sector elites. As F. Gregory Gause has argued, it is not necessarily a unique legitimacy or functional superiority that makes monarchies better at adjusting to international norms and new actors in the political arena.<sup>224</sup> Rather, the Moroccan monarchy draws on an extraordinary ability to build new coalitions, integrate new actors and extend its pluralism when necessary. This makes it much more difficult for opposition to organise and materialise. Political parties' hunger to run affairs leaves an important impression of change, which for a large part of the population neutralises resistance. In addition, political parties and associations channel popular demands and diffuse protest.

---

<sup>223</sup> Anouar Boukhars, 'The Lesson from Morocco and Jordan: Reform or Perish,' Online-Article (Washington D.C.: *Middle East Institute*, 1/9/2011). <http://www.mei.edu/content/lesson-morocco-and-jordan-reform-or-perish> (accessed 27/8/2014).

<sup>224</sup> Gause, *Kings for All Seasons* cit.

In the past decade, the WB asked the governments in Egypt and Morocco to take on a participatory approach to comprehensively preparing and implementing reforms. But only Morocco expanded the realm of decision-making to political parties and civil society representatives. On the contrary, Egypt remained in a deadlock, in which only sector and business elites close to the ruling party were included. This illustrates Egypt's inability to operate the necessary changes to governance due to its existing political configuration. While the Moroccan monarchy can tolerate a vibrant scene of concurring political parties and civil society organisations, the Egyptian republic was bound to *de facto* one-party rule. Under a system in which the president had to rely on the party that gained the parliamentary majority, party pluralism was only a tool to give one-party rule a democratic appearance.<sup>225</sup> Pluralism could only exist within professional syndicates and the ruling elite itself, both tied to the state through corporatist arrangements. The decision-making process in higher education illustrates that no opposition party—either legal or illegal but tolerated like the Muslim Brotherhood—had an impact on reform. Instead, the minister surrounded himself instead with businessmen, selected university representatives, and senior officials from the NDP. This type of governance was too weak to make reform comprehensive. It served the NDP's core constituency and ignored political and social groups emerging outside the party's sphere of influence.

Morocco's greater reform flexibility should not be confused with a system of democratic governance. On the contrary, the king's constant endeavour to integrate new actors into the realm of governance only stabilises his own hegemony. The system is a way to co-opt emerging actors from political parties and civil society organisations. It is also a way of depoliticising the struggle for reform in the name of a more technocratic type of global governance.<sup>226</sup> This system had a lasting effect on political mobilisation in the last decade. As Frédéric Vairel shows, some of Morocco's protest leaders are the inheritors of the constant struggle with the monarchy, but nowadays they are

---

<sup>225</sup> Maye Kassem, *In the Guise of Democracy: Governance in Contemporary Egypt* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1999).

<sup>226</sup> Béatrice Hibou, 'Le Mouvement du 20 février, le Makhzen et l'Antipolitique: L'Impensé des Reformes au Maroc', (Paris: Les dossiers du CERI, May 2011).

profoundly integrated into the political institutions the monarchy set up. The politics of commissions has opened new channels of participation for these former protest leaders. Consequently they act more as intermediaries for the king than as catalysts for the newly formed protest movements.<sup>227</sup> For those not yet included, such as the *diplômés chômeurs*, one of Morocco's most prominent movements, protest becomes a means to get access to the system rather than change it.<sup>228</sup> This illustrates that the constant reactivation of Morocco's political configuration through new instruments of governance determines its capacity for reform, but also has an impact on the forms and scale of social mobilisation.

## Conclusion

At the beginning of this article I argued that comparing higher education reforms in Egypt and Morocco enables us to draw a more nuanced picture of change and continuity in the wake of the 'Arab Spring.' Through the comparative analysis of policy reform, we could explore how reform in one sector opened up pockets of resistance and how these pockets could become, or not, the seeds of larger protests. As a result, the article demonstrated that Egypt's limited reform capacity in higher education was one factor that contributed to the uprising. In contrast, Morocco seemed equipped to contain pockets of protest and thereby limit the scale of the uprising. To draw a more comprehensive picture of the link between social reforms and the uprising in Egypt it would be necessary to conduct a similar analysis on other sectors and understand how contention in different sectors could finally lead to a multi-sectorial uprising where students, workers and liberal professions joined forces.

---

<sup>227</sup> Vairel, 'Qu'avez-vous fait de vos vingt ans?' cit.

<sup>228</sup> Montserrat Emperador Badimon, 'Où sont les diplômés chômeurs? Un exemple de pragmatisme protestataire à l'époque du 20 février', *Confluences Méditerranée* 78 (2011): 77-91.

But apart from exploring the link between social reform and social mobilisations, policy analysis could also identify changes and continuities before and after the Arab uprisings. The study of policy reform demonstrates that while Morocco appears to be a heaven of stability compared to Egypt and Tunisia, this stability is related to its capacity to constantly adapt its mode of governance. Its political configuration allows for greater participation of political parties and civil society in reform processes. Thus, compared to Egypt, the Moroccan monarchy could more easily face the challenges presented by the internationalisation of higher education and, apparently, by the uprising in 2011.

The 25 January uprising in Egypt also illustrates the government's failure to introduce change to its system of governance. To be successful the uprising needed the multi-sectorial character described above. But therefore it was important that sector elites were easily convinced of the likely deterioration of the regime. In the absence of meaningful change to the system of governance, the younger generation, university elites and large parts of the middle class apparently shared this perception.<sup>229</sup> Thus, Egypt's political configuration (a *de facto* one party system that acted as civil counterpart to the military's control over the political process) limited the regime's ability to prepare for necessary changes. Even after Mubarak stepped down, no serious attempt was undertaken by the Supreme Council of Armed Forces to engage civil society and protest groups into an institutionalised form or negotiation. Through limited changes to the constitution and a quick passage to elections, the military attempted to reactivate the political regime constructed under Mubarak's predecessors Gamal Abdel Nasser and Anwar El-Sadat.

To conclude, one could say that Morocco embraced continuity through change, while Egypt had to go through change because of continuity. It remains to be seen to what extent the uprising in Egypt will have a lasting effect on the political configuration and on the way reforms are prepared and implemented. So far, it seems that the political configuration will not only survive the

---

<sup>229</sup> Hazem Kandil, 'Why did the Egyptian Middle Class March to Tahrir Square?,' *Mediterranean Politics* 17, 2 (2012): 197-215.



constraints imposed by the internationalisation of higher education, but also the transformations that affected the country in the aftermath of the uprisings. As far as higher education is concerned, many of the changes students achieved after the uprising have been quickly reversed. Already in 2011, most of the university presidents in power could preserve their positions despite the temporary introduction of elections. In 2014, President Abdelfattah Sisi decided that presidents and deans would be nominated again, not elected. In addition to strong continuity in terms of individuals and institutions that shape the country, the security regime at universities and elsewhere has been revitalised. As long as universities are merely considered as a security issue and not as a space for learning and scientific research, real change in higher education will not happen and internationalisation will remain a buzzword rather than a paradigm for change.

## **Acknowledgements**

I am very grateful to Moritz Mihatsch, the two editors of this special issue and two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments on this text.

# Enduring class struggle in Tunisia: the fight for identity beyond Political Islam

FABIO MERONE<sup>230</sup>

**ABSTRACT** *This article examines the emergence of Salafism and the post-Ben Ali process of institution-building through the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that have their origin in the Bourguibian period. While Al-Nahda compromised with opposition secular parties accomplishing the integration of a moderate Islamist middle class excluded from power since independence, continuous political mobilisation and urban revolt in parallel with the liberalisation of the public space gave birth to a new radical Islamic subject, Ansar al-Sharia, which represents disenfranchised lower classes that remain excluded from enjoying the benefits of the revolution. The article highlights how this exclusion is in continuity with Tunisia's modern history, where the threat of radical Islamism has often been deployed to mystify social class exclusion.*

**Keywords:** Tunisia, Salafism, Nation-building, Islamism, Social Class

## Introduction

Following the fall of Ben Ali, Tunisia has been undergoing a difficult democratic transition.<sup>231</sup> The final outcome of this process might not be the liberal-democratic system that many external observers wished for, although the approval of a new constitution in early 2014 suggests that this outcome might not be as far-fetched as it first seemed. Whatever the ultimate institutional outcome, the fall of the regime opened up spaces for the participation of citizens, political parties, civil society groups and social movements to mobilise and advance their visions of the future. The country moved rapidly towards a new political and social framework in which freedom of expression, in sharp contrast with the past, is an untouchable hallmark.

This change into a 'democracy' is however less than coherent and different outcomes to the 2011 revolution are still possible.<sup>232</sup> Similarly to the other countries that witnessed revolutionary changes, different political and social trends have appeared in Tunisia, often contradicting one another. From a regional perspective, there are a number of elements that stand out. The emergence of Islamist parties as the leading actors in the region has led to the creation of a coalition of different political and social forces to oppose them, some of which are still linked to the power structures of the

---

<sup>230</sup> MENARG (Middle East and North Africa Research Group), Department of Conflict and Development Studies, Ghent University. Email: menarg@ugent

<sup>231</sup> Alfred Stepan, 'Tunisia's transition and the twin tolerations,' *Journal of Democracy* 23, 2 (2012): 89-103.

<sup>232</sup> Nouri Gana (ed.), *The Making of the Tunisian Revolution. Contexts, Architects, Prospects* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

authoritarian past, as the Egyptian case highlights. The persistence and even deepening of the economic crisis, together with the absence of immediate material benefits for large strata of the population, has led the parties now in power to be accused of incompetence and unaccountability, which is a point that also Hanieh makes in his contribution to this special issue.<sup>233</sup> A sort of longing for the relative economic stability of the pre-revolutionary period has also re-emerged. This occurs at a time of high volatility with members of the former ruling elite attempting to come back on the scene, claiming to be the only individuals capable of dealing with the inefficacious squabbling between the new political contenders. As mentioned earlier, the Egyptian case is the most extreme example of this dynamic, with the return of the military as ultimate decision-maker in the political struggle, but the Libyan case also points to the messiness of post-authoritarian politics and the longing for a degree of stability and security. Thus, while much has certainly changed following the fall of Mubarak, Ben Ali and other dictators in the region, there are also a number of continuities that affect states and politics.<sup>234</sup>

Tunisia has much in common with these regional transitional trends, demonstrating both change from and continuity with its past. This article makes a fundamental claim from which an analysis of both change and continuity derives. It suggests that the process of regime change with the institutionalisation of the Islamist party Al-Nahda is the outcome of a long nation-building process and that it might not as revolutionary as it first seemed. While the revolution gave the opportunity to a conservative middle class to be included within the structures of power through its political representative, Al-Nahda, marking a change with the past, this has come at the price of the continuing neglect of Tunisia's disenfranchised, who remain excluded from power-sharing dynamics in continuity with the past.

At the beginning of the 1980s, two broad different trends occupied the scene of the opposition camp in Tunisia: Islamist and liberal. Their ideological disputes and confrontations emerged in the context of the political struggle for democratisation, but the two camps did not manage to cooperate successfully to provide a viable alternative to the regime in place. By the end of the 1980s, the conflict between the two became in fact so intense that the self-defined secular liberal parties largely stood with the regime against the Islamists.<sup>235</sup> This confrontation between Islamists and liberals does not simply have an ideological dimension; it also coincided with a social class conflict. Different social classes in Tunisia have been struggling since independence to be included in the process of state-building. In the nation-building process, class struggle does not only produce the domination of one class over another.<sup>236</sup> The dominant class also develops a national narrative for

---

<sup>233</sup> Emma Murphy, 'The Tunisian Uprising and the Precarious Path to Democracy,' *Mediterranean Politics* 16, 2 (2011): 299-305. See also: Adam Hanieh, 'Shifting Priorities or Business as Usual? Continuity and Change in the post-2011 IMF and World Bank Engagement with Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt,' *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, 1 (2015).

<sup>234</sup> Goldberg Ellis, 'Mubarakism without Mubarak,' *Foreign Affairs*, 11/2/2011 (<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67416/ellis-goldberg/mubarakism-without-mubarak>, accessed 18/9/2014).

<sup>235</sup> Rikke Hostrup Haugbølle and Francesco Cavatorta, 'Will the real Tunisian opposition please stand up? Opposition coordination failures under authoritarian constraints,' *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 38, 3 (2011): 335.

<sup>236</sup> I refer here to Antonio Gramsci's classical theory of hegemony, which examines how the dominant class builds an ideological apparatus in order to establish and strengthen its hegemony through ideology. Antonio

its own purposes, in order to secure its hegemony, engendering dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. In Tunisia, the modern nation state was built on the basic principle of modernisation. In order to realise it, the national leadership needed a unifying ideology in which national belonging was translated into a myth based on national identity, the *tunisianité*. Inclusion into the national ethos was and still is the condition for the success of the process of democratisation. Thus, the conflicting dynamics that emerged after regime change in 2011 must be explained as a process in which the new and old powers struggle one against the other; the new emerging powers fight to be included, the older ones to exclude the former. In short, the heirs of Bourguibian nationalism, allied with liberal and left-wing parties, have used the ideological tool of ‘modernity’ to exclude since at least the 1970s the ‘new kids on the block’ – the Islamists – from shaping the national narrative and ethos of the modern Tunisian state, labelling them as ‘backward.’ However, through both electoral legitimacy and political moderation,<sup>237</sup> the Islamists have now entered the political system and in some ways accepted the concept of *tunisianité*, signalling a rupture with the past and striking an uneasy compromise with sectors of the secular left.

The process of radicalisation of the disenfranchised youth, on the contrary, is part of the struggle of marginalised social classes to be included in the ‘Nation.’<sup>238</sup> Their exclusion from the nation-building process and institutions of governance, and particularly from the benefits of the economy, is the most powerful indicator of what has not changed in Tunisia. Thus, change and continuity can be explained in the framework of a transitional process whereby new and old actors are trying to find a deal to live with each other in a democratic country, where one can legitimately take part without annihilating the other.

The notions of change and continuity are deployed to examine the Tunisian transition at both elite and grassroots levels. In the first part of the article, I follow the evolution of the inclusion/exclusion dynamic focusing on the middle class and its transformations throughout Tunisian history since independence. In the second part, I focus on Ansar al-Sharia, a radical Salafi movement that emerged in the aftermath of the Jasmine revolution. I propose that the conservative Islamist-leaning middle class is keener on compromise and accepts continuity with the past for the sake of inclusion, whereas AST can be seen as a social movement working towards the mobilisation of the disenfranchised for radical change.

---

Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere. Gli intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura*, Vol. II (Torino: Einaudi, 1948-1951): 9.

<sup>237</sup> Alaya Allani, ‘The Islamists in Tunisia between confrontation and participation: 1980–2008,’ *The Journal of North African Studies* 14, 2 (2009): 257-272; Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone, ‘Moderation through exclusion? The journey of the Tunisian Ennahda from fundamentalist to conservative party,’ *Democratization* 20, 5 (2013): 857-875.

<sup>238</sup> Despite more recent findings on the middle class leaning towards radical Islamism, previous studies point to the connection between on the one side Salafism and radical Islamic movements and, on the other side, social exclusion and disenfranchised social groups. Gilles Kepel (*Le prophète et Pharaon. Les mouvements islamistes dans l’Egypte contemporaine* (Paris: La Découverte, 1984) explains, for example, how the emergence of radical Islamic movements in the 1970s was the effect of rural migration towards the city and consequent social exclusion. Patrick Haenni, *L’ordre des Caid: conjurer la dissidence urbaine au Caire* (Paris: Karthala, 2005) also reaches similar conclusions after his ethnographic research in one poor neighbourhood of Cairo. For the case of Algeria, see Louis Martinez, *The Algerian civil war, 1990-98* (Chicago: Columbia University Press, 2000).

## Inclusion in and exclusion from the process of institution-building

Since the January 14<sup>th</sup> revolution, political elites struggled to find a constitutional solution to the vacuum of power caused by the departure of the president. A newly appointed government, which drew legal legitimacy from what has been defined as the ‘general consensus,’<sup>239</sup> elaborated a new institutional plan. Under the pressure of the revolutionary street, the old constitution, the ruling party – the RCD - and the department of the political police were dissolved. The same revolutionary movement provided, in exchange, the necessary legitimacy for the transitional government to accomplish the mission of leading the country towards the foundational democratic election of the Constituent Assembly (CA). In parallel to the government, a representative Assembly for the realisation of the goals of the revolution (ISROR, its French acronym) was formed including a large spectrum of political views, guaranteeing a degree of pluralism in the process. Although the attempt at framing regime change as a democratic process was not new in Tunisia,<sup>240</sup> this time a genuine democratic praxis was developed. In fact, through the first transparent elections in the country’s history, the election of the CA was the evidence of a radical change in the traditional process of Tunisia’s state-building.

As a nation-state, Tunisia was born out of independence from France in 1956; the idea of nation was the ideological underpinning of the nationalist movement. Similar to other countries of the region, nationalism was the outcome of the liberation struggle against the coloniser. Those involved in the process of nation-building after independence came from the middle class and the French education system, which provided them with the ideological tools to build the new state. Chief among the dominant ideals this middle class held was modernity, understood as the overcoming of both economic and social underdevelopment, which was believed to be the product of backward institutions and social habits such as religious faith.<sup>241</sup>

This new middle class constituted the backbone of the bureaucracy in independent Tunisia and utilised nationalism and a progressive idea of modernisation to legitimise the institutions of the state.<sup>242</sup> Bourguiba framed this drive towards modernisation through the marginalisation of Islam, relegating it to the private sphere, and through the injection of secular practices and Western-oriented economic and social institutions into the public sphere. Despite its authoritarian nature, which characterised Ben Ali’s time as well, many secular-modernist Tunisians shared the goal of developmental modernisation and felt that Islamism was an obstacle to it. In reality, the generation

---

<sup>239</sup> The ‘general consensus’ was the expression deployed by Tunisian jurists to legally justify the new government and the new assembly’s mandates, which lasted longer than the two months provided for in the constitution.

<sup>240</sup> Lisa Anderson, ‘Political pacts, liberalism, and democracy: the Tunisian national pact of 1988,’ *Government and Opposition* 26, 2 (1991): 244-260.

<sup>241</sup> Emma Murphy, *Economic and political change in Tunisia: from Bourguiba to Ben Ali* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999).

<sup>242</sup> James Bill, ‘Class analysis and the dialectics of modernization in the Middle East,’ *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 3, 4 (1972): 417-34; Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Emma Murphy, ‘Transformation of the corporatist state in the Middle East,’ *Third World Quarterly* 17, 4 (1996): 753-772. See also Michael Ayari, *S’engager en regime autoritaire: Gauchistes et Islamistes dans la Tunisie indépendante* (Thèse de Doctorat, Université Paul Cézanne Aix-Marseille III, 2009).

that struggled for independence against France was split in two factions, both of which were nevertheless committed to the idea and goal of modernisation. One faction was led by Bourghiba and the other by Salah Ben Youssef.<sup>243</sup> The Bourghibian faction prevailed in this internal struggle and isolated its adversary. The visions these factions had for Tunisia's future, however, had different cultural underpinnings, with Bourguiba's faction looking to Atatürk's model and being influenced by French rationalism, whereas the Youssefist faction was aligned with pan-Arabism and looked at the experience of Nasser. After independence, Bourguiba got rid of Ben Youssef and the so-called 'Zeitunian heritage',<sup>244</sup> because it was in conflict with Bourguiba's radically secular vision of modernisation. In fact, the Zeitunian sheikhs were considered the highest representatives of the old social order and as such they were perceived to be against modernisation. It followed that the part of the middle class aligned with Ben Youssef was marginalised from enjoying the spoils of power.<sup>245</sup> The transitional process of 2011 has included contestation of the Bourghibian conception of *tunisianité*,<sup>246</sup> with the old Islamic/pan-Arabic ethos resurfacing and finding new legitimacy thanks to the arrival of Al-Nahda to power.

Thus, while the social and political modernist-nationalist bloc<sup>247</sup> seemed to be the real loser of the transitional process, the traditionally excluded Islamists became the largest political movement in the country. Partially reprising Ben Youssef's nationalist discourse and agenda, they demanded a more democratic process of institution-building through Al-Nahda and, in part, the Congress for the Republic Party.<sup>248</sup> Thus, it seemed that the post-2011 democratisation process finally included those social groups previously excluded.

The conflict between the nationalist middle-class (over-represented in the bureaucratic and repressive apparatuses, and enjoying an enormous ideological prestige) and the Islamic conservative middle class was the main obstacle to democratisation and inclusive state-building in post-independence Tunisia. The 2011 revolution permitted a sort of reconciliation between these two ideologically different middle classes. It is the compromise between them that drives the Tunisian transition today. This compromise constitutes a genuine change with respect to the past because there is agreement, albeit implicit and at times contested, that the Islamist ethos has to be integrated and has to contribute to the new democratic Tunisia.

The delicate balance between these two opposite forces - Islamic and secular - is in many ways the factor determining the balance between change and continuity in post-revolution Tunisia. On the one hand, there is continuity in the sense that despite pluralism, or possibly because of it, the

---

<sup>243</sup> Kenneth Perkins, *A history of modern Tunisia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 249.

<sup>244</sup> Interestingly enough, after the 2011 revolution, this representation changed and today the Zeitunian tradition is regarded as the first reformist movement of Tunisia. Malika Zeghal, 'Competing Ways of Life: Islamism, Secularism, and Public Order in the Tunisian Transition,' *Constellations* 20, 2 (2013): 254-274.

<sup>245</sup> Francesco Cavatorta and Rikke Haugbølle, 'The end of authoritarian rule and the mythology of Tunisia under Ben Ali,' *Mediterranean Politics* 17, 2 (2012): 179-195.

<sup>246</sup> Larbi Sadiki, 'The Search for Citizenship in Bin Ali's Tunisia: Democracy versus Unity,' *Political studies* 50, 3 (2002): 497-513.

<sup>247</sup> I refer here to those people who took advantage from inclusion in the colonial system and were able to better interpret the need of modernisation as an essential aspect of the anti-colonial struggle.

<sup>248</sup> The party was founded in Paris in 2001 by the human rights activist Moncef Marzouki, who is today the President of the Republic. This party was the backbone of the political alliance that supported the Al-Nahda-led government.

struggle between Islamism and the French-inspired modernism with its emphasis on *laïcité* is still very much present, as the debates around contested issues like individual freedoms show. On the other hand, there is also significant rupture with the past because traditional Islamism has become multifaceted and diverse, and the effort that Al-Nahda and the modernists are making to find a compromise to secure Tunisia's democratic future is challenged by other powerful, more radical Islamist forces. These groups are not only challenging the contents of the compromise between Al-Nahda and the modernists. Crucially, they are by implication challenging the *middle class compromise* upon which the new Tunisia is being constructed. This has resulted in the re-emergence of old repressive practices, representing continuity with the past, when it comes to dealing with challengers who claim that they are not included in this revised concept of *tunisianité* and are therefore excluded from both its material and identity benefits.

### The 'deep state' and the institutional democratic praxis

In post-Ben Ali's Tunisia, institution-building began with the experience of the Leagues for the Protection of the Revolution. It was the first time in Tunisian history that councils were gathering and discussing freely and democratically.<sup>249</sup> In addition to political representatives, human rights groups, feminist organisations and the bar association also participated, along with young bloggers and representatives from the 'remote' regions of inner Tunisia.<sup>250</sup> After the October 2011 elections, the ANC (the constitutional assembly) became the real arena of political conflict. In this phase of the process, and for the first time in the history of the country, all different cultural and political traditions gathered and debated foundational issues.<sup>251</sup>

However, the institutional process of change engendered by the 2011 uprising was limited to a specific social class: the middle class. In part this reflects how negotiated political transitions work: dealing with rules and procedural mechanisms first to the detriment of regulating and solving economic and social conflicts. It would be impossible to deal with social conflicts in a democratising country, when the institutions of the state need to be rebuilt amidst great volatility; they are left for later, once the political system is stable. This type of transitions favours democratic liberty over wealth redistribution, with the middle class being both the protagonist and the beneficiary of it.<sup>252</sup> In Tunisia, the majority of the population was side-lined by this process, partly because material preoccupations were prioritised over debates about institutions and procedural mechanisms, and partly because the process itself failed to include them by focusing emphatically on identity and rules rather than economics. The revolutionary process expressed the frustration of both a new generation and a marginalised social class that remained on the margins of the

---

<sup>249</sup> Sami Zemni, 'The Extraordinary Politics of the Tunisian Revolution: The Process of Constitution Making,' *Mediterranean Politics* (2014). Available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13629395.2013.874108#.VCmdGPldWpA>

<sup>250</sup> Representatives from the regions of the interior were invited because of the important role they played during the uprising and because they represent the socio-economic divide existing in the country. Such developmental divide has been recognised as one of the main sources of social injustice.

<sup>251</sup> Rym Abidi, vice-president of a network of development associations, interview with the author, Tunis 29/9/2013.

<sup>252</sup> As also noted by Giuseppe di Palma, *To craft democracies: an Essay on Democratic Transitions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

institutional process of democratic transition. Most of those involved in Tunisia's negotiated transition<sup>253</sup> either belong to an older generation or represented, like Al-Nahda, those who wanted to compromise in order to be integrated into the national project. The collaboration between the liberals who opposed Ben Ali's authoritarianism but not his secular modernisation project, and the Islamists started in the mid-2000s, when Al-Nahda's moderation process intensified.<sup>254</sup> The institution-building process in post-revolutionary transition has created the conditions for such a process of collaboration and compromise to be completed. Al-Nahda has become a conservative moderate party inspired by Islamic values,<sup>255</sup> shedding its radicalism.

However, the uprising activated a new social subject, largely composed of radical, young disenfranchised people. The definition of this revolutionary subject as a specific political actor is problematic. In the aftermath of the fall of Ben Ali, debates about who would deserve the title of 'revolutionary subject' heated up. While it was agreed that society as a whole adhered to the revolutionary outcome, there was little doubt that the 'youth,' or 'the revolting generation,' was the protagonist of the uprising. More specifically, it was so for those who were in the streets during the uprising clashing with police. In fact, through physical confrontation with the security apparatus, they were the ones responsible for the collapse of Ben Ali's regime.<sup>256</sup> This specific group did not have a political or ideological frame of action, but was motivated by frustration. When the transition went on into the 'normality' phase, they were unable to find a party representing their interests, and in general they refused to engage in the institutional process.<sup>257</sup> Though they have not organised into a party or a formal movement, this group of marginalised youth continued to exist on the public scene and the revolutionary success they obtained provided them with enough confidence to think they could challenge the system. Thus, this new subject is composed of the revolutionary and marginalised youth that, in the post-revolutionary context, holds the rest of society accountable for not sharing the material and, equally important, identity and intangible benefits of the revolution. This new subject can be subsumed under the label of a type of activism that many Tunisians did not even suspect could develop locally, namely jihadi Salafism.<sup>258</sup>

Despite representing a rupture with the past, the emergence of jihadi Salafism also highlights a point of continuity with pre-2011 Tunisia, in particular for the way in which those who dissent from the content and buzzwords of the mainstream, national project are treated by authorities. After the revolution, the middle class compromise between former rivals on what modernisation and

---

<sup>253</sup> Gianluca Parolin, 'Constitutions against Revolutions. Political Participation in North Africa,' *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, 1 (2015).

<sup>254</sup> Allani, 'The Islamists in Tunisia between confrontation and participation,' cit.

<sup>255</sup> Luca Ozzano, 'The many faces of the political god: a typology of religiously oriented parties,' *Democratization* 20, 5 (2013): 807-830.

<sup>256</sup> Amin Allal, 'Avant on tenait le mur, maintenant on tient le quartier!,' *Politique Africaine* 1 (2011): 53-67; Paola Rivetti, 'The Journey of Protests in the Mediterranean and Beyond: A Discussion About and For Social Movements,' *Jadaliyya*, 27/7/2013, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/13051/the-journey-of-protests-in-the-mediterranean-and-b> (accessed 27/8/2014).

<sup>257</sup> From now onwards, the article contains observations and statements resulting from my ethnographic fieldwork.

<sup>258</sup> Fabio Merone, 'Salafism in Tunisia: an interview with a member of Ansar al-Sharia,' *Jadaliyya*, 11/4/2013. [http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/11166/salafism-in-tunisia\\_an-interview-with-a-member-of-](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/11166/salafism-in-tunisia_an-interview-with-a-member-of-) (accessed 27/8/2014).



democracy mean for Tunisia, was under threat from those who dissent on the content and forms of such a political project. As before the revolution, the reaction of the establishment has been political marginalisation and repression.

One example is representative of this repressive praxis. At the end of August 2013, the Interior Minister declared Ansar al-Sharia (AST, the jihadi Salafi group) a terrorist organisation,<sup>259</sup> highlighting a number of practical and symbolic continuities with Ben Ali's regime. First, the Interior Minister referred to the anti-terrorism legislation, an instrument that had been prominent in 'legalising' Ben Ali's repression against the Islamists and, more generally, political opponents. Second, the whole scene reminded many of a similar press conference held in 1992, when representatives of the security apparatus showed evidences of Al-Nahda's involvement in terrorist activities and outlawed it. The labelling of AST as a terrorist organisation resulted in a ban on its public activities and made its membership illegal.<sup>260</sup> Symbolically, the old bureaucracy was 'showing off' and taking revenge on the protagonists of the revolutionary change.

### **The same old story. Pragmatic Islamists and the modern middle class versus a new mobilisation**

As described in the previous section, street mobilisation demonstrates that elements of change and continuity overlap, as Paola Rivetti suggests in the introduction to this special issue.<sup>261</sup> The demand for democracy is nothing new in Tunisia's history, as the tentative democratic process of late 1980s demonstrates.<sup>262</sup> The liberals were part of the generation and social class that shared the ethos of the Bourghibian national project based on *tunisianité*, and had benefited from independence. Later, this group was joined by the old Marxist-Leninist generation, converted now to liberal-democracy. Until 2011, political struggles took place within the same social class and did not entail any deviation from the 'modernisation project,' as inspired by rationalism and secularism with an emphasis on Tunisia being different from the rest of the Arab world. Ben Ali came to power in 1987 promising that the process of nation state-building would not derail from such developmental modernity, including democratisation and the protection of liberties. Therefore, the process seemed to evolve towards its 'natural' outcome: the consolidation of a democratic system based on a deal reconciling the two opposite parties within the same social class, sharing a similar vision of the world. Ben Ali's objective was to formalise a democratic social contract, a goal which had been frustrated in the past by Bourguiba's autocratic resilience.

The apparently linear evolution of this middle-class reconciliation was interrupted by the Islamists. They emerged as a major political force in the moderately free elections of 1989, but the

---

<sup>259</sup> Perrine Massy, 'Ali Laârayedh: 'Nous avons décidé de classer Ansar al-Charia comme une organisation terroriste,' *Nawaa/Politics*, 27/8/2013. <http://nawaat.org/portail/2013/08/27/ali-laarayedh-nous-avons-decide-de-classer-ansar-al-charia-comme-une-organisation-terroriste/> (accessed 27/8/2014).

<sup>260</sup> Perrine Massy, 'Ali Laârayedh', cit.

<sup>261</sup> Paola Rivetti, 'Continuity and change before and after the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco. Regime reconfiguration and policy-making in North Africa', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 42, 1 (2015).

<sup>262</sup> Lisa Anderson, 'Political pacts, liberalism, and democracy,' cit.

regime, refusing to grant them political legitimacy, decided to repress them with the backing of the majority of the other political groupings. The marginalisation of the Islamists was framed as ‘a struggle for civilisation’; the Islamists became the obstacle to the evolution of the modern state and the deployment of any means against them was justifiable. More than two decades later, Al-Nahda’s big opportunity arose in the context of the revolutionary process of 2011, which was followed by a transparent electoral process and the formation of a new government with the party at its helm.

Doubtless, the victory of Al-Nahda constitutes a change, but not a fundamental one. It also represents the accomplishment of a long-term political process, as the party members had already internalised the concept of *tunisianité*. When the Nahdaouis came to power, they were representatives of an old generation with little to no radical strength.<sup>263</sup> By the time it won the elections, Al-Nahda was no longer representing either the rebellious, revolutionary young generation or the project of establishing an Islamic state. Indeed, the moderate Islamic party represents a conservative social middle class that has always been keen to support and assimilate to the national project in exchange for material benefits and some references to their Islamic, conservative values. Of course, from an institutional point of view, Al-Nahda’s electoral victory represents a big shift in the balance of power within the national political elite. However, socially it was not the real novelty. As mentioned earlier, the actual change is that the uprising allowed for the mobilisation of new and rebellious street actors that stand out as new social and political subjects.

The revolutionary process was the consequence of a deep split within society along a social class divide,<sup>264</sup> and the generational cleavage overlapped with it to a significant extent. More than suffering from the absence of democracy, young people from lower social classes suffered from what can be described as social exclusion. Although they emerged as a visible actor during and after the uprising, this disenfranchised youth has however been present on the public scene for a decade, thanks to its role in contesting the regime. Under Ben Ali’s rule, these youngsters were known by the security apparatus for clashing with police during football matches,<sup>265</sup> and it is no coincidence that the first songs of freedom, defiant of the regime, were shouted without fear in stadiums.<sup>266</sup> These young people expressed their rejection of the system by rioting with the police when the circumstances made it possible or by escaping from the country, dreaming of the European

---

<sup>263</sup> According to Zied Krishen, chief editor of the daily newspaper *al-Maghreb*, ‘the revolution saved Nahda from a sure political death’ (Interview with the author, Tunis, Winter 2012); Graham Usher, ‘The Reawakening of Nahda in Tunisia’, *MERIP online*, 30/4/2011. [http://www.merip.org/mero/mero043011?utm\\_source=twitterfeed&utm\\_medium=twitter](http://www.merip.org/mero/mero043011?utm_source=twitterfeed&utm_medium=twitter) (accessed 28/8/2014).

<sup>264</sup> Although bloggers constituted a challenge to the regime and their actions came to international attention, the ‘real revolution was in the streets while we were behind the screen of a PC’ (interview with the author, Sofiene Bel Haj, Tunis, Spring 2011). While most of the people that took part in the clashes overwhelmingly represented the lower strata of the society, the urban middle/high class participated in different types of mobilisation. They did not share either political sensibility or material concerns. These key differences emerged after the fall of the regime, when limitations to the establishment of a cohesive and unique revolutionary front became evident. See also Rivetti, ‘The Journey of Protests in the Mediterranean and Beyond,’ cit.

<sup>265</sup> Larissa Chomiak, John Entelis, ‘The Making of North Africa’s Intifadas,’ *Middle East Report*, 259 (2012): 8-15.

<sup>266</sup> Revolutionary and revolting artistic expressions, such as rap and break dance, or the organised presence of football fans in stadiums seem to be the typical ‘venues’ for the disenfranchised youth to express frustration and unhappiness with the status quo.

Eldorado. When they talked about freedom, they did not think of freedom of elections or multi-party politics, but the freedom to realise their dreams that sometimes are as simple as to have enough money to get married.<sup>267</sup> Most of their hatred was directed against the police because it represents both repression and corruption at the same time. Policemen or RCD's local patrons were present in their lives as living symbols of what kept the repressive system working and of corruption. It should not be a surprise that this cohort of young people was not really interested in the establishment of a democratic system after the revolution. Neither were they interested in the strengthening of a democratic, gradual integration of the moderate Islamic party Al-Nahda into the institution-building process, as the party did not interpret or represent their radicalism. In addition, they were not interested in the debate about *tunisianité*, with its corollary of the reification of tolerance and pluralism as characteristics inextricably linked to what it means to be Tunisian. Most of them found a way to express their political and anti-system radicalism in the *salafist mouvance*.

This radicalisation and class divide are not new in Tunisia, because the processes of nation and state-building themselves entail class struggle. Each period of transformation in the recent history of the country has corresponded to attempts on the part of a specific social class to enter the political game in order to share the national contract and, at least partially, power. This was the case for the Intifada of 1983, the so called 'bread revolt,' when 'for the first time lower classes entered national history.'<sup>268</sup> This same tumultuous group was in the background during the last period of Bourghiba's rule and in the early 1990s, when the clash between the Islamists and the state took place. It did not mature, though, as a social movement until the opening up of the public sphere after the fall of Ben Ali. The success of the uprising, symbolised by the collapse of the dictatorship, and the emergence of a new Islamic paradigm after the revolution, gave them the chance to become a social and political movement.

If we look at post-revolutionary social and generational cleavages, there is little doubt that so far the transitional institutional process has failed in integrating this disenfranchised social group. The ones that took over the political scene belong to a different generation (the one of the 1980s) and to a different social class, representing in some ways a factor of continuity with the past. The basic political request of the middle class in power today was democracy and not material benefits, which, comparatively speaking, they never genuinely lacked.<sup>269</sup> As explained above, in the context of Tunisian modern history, they represent a generation who has been waiting for decades to join in the process of building the modern Tunisian nation-state. In order to do so, they learned that there is nothing better than democracy. This belief is shared by liberals, leftists and moderate Islamists alike.<sup>270</sup> Because of the failure of this democratic-oriented process in the 1980s, the country suffered from two decades of frozen social and political activities. The revolution made it possible for these actors to return to the scene and resume their roles, while others were left behind. Once

---

<sup>267</sup> Wassim, a young man from Khetmine, Bizerte province, an area where emigration to Italy has been very strong in the last decade. Interview with the author, Khetmine, November 2010.

<sup>268</sup> This is according to Heithem Chabouni, former member of the Communist party, today Nidaa party. Interview with the author, Tunis Spring 2011.

<sup>269</sup> During the 1990s and 2000s, there was a general consensus on the fact that the growth of the middle class was one of the outcomes of the economic growth. However, this was only partially true and lasted only till 2008, when the international financial crisis began to impact on Tunisia too.

<sup>270</sup> This became evident in 2005, when modernist, Leftist and Islamist groups came together to form the Democratic Front. They shared a common interest in a democratic reform of the system.

again, it is worth highlighting that there is nothing odd about the Tunisian transition insofar as the requirements of 'crafting democracy' demand that social conflicts are frozen in favour of an almost exclusive focus on mechanisms and procedures to ensure liberty, as Gianluca Parolin also makes clear in his contribution to this special issue.

Those who participated and still participate in street politics and those who took the power after Ben Ali's departure are not the same. They do not share any common ground socially, geographically or generationally. The low electoral turnout at the October 2011 election suggests that the youth and a significant part of the society were at least sceptical of the liberal democratic process, largely unknown to them. Indeed, in parallel with the institutional process, another social dynamic developed to 'include' a chunk of this socially marginalised youth. A large and spontaneous process of Islamisation of society, which had already begun to be evident in the later years of Ben Ali's regime,<sup>271</sup> emerged from below. If different degrees of Islamic belonging fitted different social groups, the one that best interpreted and represented the antagonism and the radicalism of disenfranchised youth was Jihadism. Jihadism is not representative of a social class in the Marxist sense, and this youth cannot be equated with working class either because it does not have an organised political relevance, but is an expression of subalternity and alienation.<sup>272</sup>

### **Ansar al-Sharia as the expression of a new social movement**

Ansar al-Sharia (AST) is the new youth social movement that emerged from the revolutionary process.<sup>273</sup> It inherited, from the past decade, the 'mythological' enterprise of Al-Qaeda's *mujahedeen*, but it adapted it to the new liberal and democratic scenario of post-Ben Ali Tunisia. As surprising as it may be, the jihadi movement is not a novelty in Tunisia. Even though the dictatorship had been particularly repressive of Islamic radicalism, a new generation of Islamists resurfaced in Tunisia since the beginning of the 2000s.<sup>274</sup> Despite the lack of awareness of its existence among ordinary Tunisians, who discovered their own radical Islamists after the revolution, jihadism was a form of identity for the latest generation of the revolting youth. As argued by Stefano Torelli et al., the events of Soliman in 2007 were a powerful reminder of this.<sup>275</sup> A group of jihadist coming from Algeria penetrated into Tunisia and got logistic support from a relatively large network of people in Sidi Bouzid, Sousse and Tunis. Even more significant was the participation of an important group of Tunisians in the international jihadi movement. Many of them were imprisoned under the anti-terrorism law of 2003, which was supported by the US

---

<sup>271</sup> Rikke Haugbølle and Francesco Cavatorta, 'Beyond Ghannouchi. Islamism and Social Change in Tunisia,' *Middle East Report*, 262 (2012): 20-25.

<sup>272</sup> I refer here to Spivak's conceptualisation of subalternity, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?,' in Rosalind C. Morris, *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 21-77.

<sup>273</sup> Anne Wolf, 'An Islamist 'renaissance'? Religion and politics in post-revolutionary Tunisia,' *The Journal of North African Studies* 18, 4 (2013): 560-573.

<sup>274</sup> Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, *Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia's long game*, ICCT Research paper, 2013. <http://www.icct.nl/download/file/Gartenstein-Ross-Ansar-al-Sharia-Tunisia's-Long-Game-May-2013.pdf> (accessed 28/8/2014).

<sup>275</sup> Stefano Torelli, Fabio Merone and Francesco Cavatorta, 'Salafism in Tunisia: Challenges and Opportunities for Democratization,' *Middle East Policy* 19, 4 (2012): 140-154.

administration and swiftly adopted by Ben Ali's regime. AST originated from Tunisian detention centres as a project incubated over a long period of time.<sup>276</sup> It indeed represented a factor of continuity with a struggle that part of the Tunisian youth had consciously undertaken for over a decade. However, despite its earlier existence, this jihadi project was transformed by the unexpected uprising in 2011. Thus, a completely new Islamic radical project was founded, rooted in *dawa* (call) instead of *qital* (fight).<sup>277</sup>

The large Islamic wave that came out from the post-revolutionary process was an explosion that burst out as a consequence of the long-standing repression of all forms of organised Islamism, whether political or not. Islamism was the expression of this disenfranchised youth that appeared in the aftermath of the revolution, which had succeed in revolting and toppling down Ben Ali but failed to turn its radicalism into a political project. During the first two years of the transition and until the attack on the American Embassy in September 2012, the control of the state was rather weak, and this exposed lower class neighbourhoods to a new type of socialisation that empowered Salafi youth.<sup>278</sup> Further frustrated by the lack of material benefits deriving from the revolution they contributed to bring about, this youth found a strong spiritual motivation in Salafist militancy. The territorial identity of Salafists is rooted in neighbourhoods, where a strong degree of solidarity between them and the inhabitants is detectable, despite the fact that groups of radical Salafists may interfere with the private life of the people and with their traditional creed.<sup>279</sup> This identity overlap between the Salafists and the people from lower class neighbourhoods is further strengthened by the repression the central state is carrying out against Salafism. This was the case for the Minister of Interior's campaign against AST, a move that motivated the supporters of a big soccer team to declare their support for AST with a statement,<sup>280</sup> despite the apparent contradiction between soccer fans and Salafists' expected behaviour. More than a religious group, AST was in this case perceived as a movement representing the youth coming from a specific, lower class socio-economic background.<sup>281</sup> This young generation of Tunisians is looking for instruments of political expression, yet avoiding all institutional and conventional ones: 'civil society' associations and mainstream political parties are indeed perceived as too distant.

---

<sup>276</sup> Hassen Breik, responsible for Dawa in Ansar Al-Sharia. Interview with the author, Yasminette 10/10/2012.

<sup>277</sup> See: Merone, 'Interview with Hassen Ben Brik: Islamic state but not through violence... for now,' 24/9/2012, in Italian ([http://nena-news.globalist.it/Detail\\_News\\_Display?ID=35486&typeb=0&24-09-2012--Intervista-Hassan-Ben-Brik-Stato-islamico-non-con-la-forza--per-ora-](http://nena-news.globalist.it/Detail_News_Display?ID=35486&typeb=0&24-09-2012--Intervista-Hassan-Ben-Brik-Stato-islamico-non-con-la-forza--per-ora-), accessed 28/8/2014). In this interview, Hassen Breik, AST's person in charge for Dawa, expresses this idea very clearly.

<sup>278</sup> I have witnessed this process myself since 2011 during my fieldwork. This is especially true in the outskirts of Tunis, in areas such as Dahwar Hisher, Ettadhamen, Ibn Khaldoun, El Kram, and Yasminette, or in other cities such as Sousse, Menzel Bourghiba, Sidi Bouzid, Kasserine, and Keirouan.

<sup>279</sup> The most disturbing practice of these groups of puritans is the so-called vigilantism or, in theological terms, the '*amr bil maaruf wa annahi an al-munkar*' ('bidding the good and forbidding the evil'). In the aftermath of the revolution, actions such as disturbing theatre representations or punishing particular behaviours in the neighbourhood, created a wide discontent among the population. After a debate over the opportunity of encouraging or discouraging such activities, the leaders of AST forbade the Salafi youth to commit such actions.

<sup>280</sup> Les supporters de l'EST et du CA au congrès de Ansar al-Charia, *Direct Info*, 16/5/2013. <http://directinfo.webmanagercenter.com/2013/05/16/les-supporters-de-lest-et-du-ca-au-congres-dansar-al-chariaa/> (accessed 28/8/2014).

<sup>281</sup> See Mosaiquefm 'Ansar al Sharia prévoit des confrontations avec la police avec le support des supporters de football', 16/05/2013, in Arabic. <http://goo.gl/Nx5ePt> (accessed 28/8/2014).

Then, it appears rather indisputable that AST was the group that most benefitted from this activism, which is and remains outside of an institutional framework. Indeed, most of the AST members have that same social background: they do not speak in the name of the disenfranchised, they are part of them.<sup>282</sup> The daily practices of social life in the neighbourhoods, which generally are male-dominated and gender segregated spaces, made it easier for these young activists to accept AST's ideological framework. The AST movement sublimates the strong masculine relationships typical of those social spaces, and charges them with further spiritual value. The mosque comes to replicate the social function of the *cafés* in these working class neighbourhoods.<sup>283</sup> The male groups of young people hanging around for hours in the neighbourhoods were transformed into the *jamaa*, explicitly referring to the first pious Muslim community. Such identification with a 'special group' of elected individuals allowed these young men to finally overcome the enormous social complex they suffer from vis-à-vis the bourgeoisie, which had treated them as backwards and failed men.<sup>284</sup>

While this process of Salafisation contains elements of change and continuity, the reaction of the state and political elite to it has to be fully ascribed to the category of the continuity with the past. When Ali Laraayedh (the then-Prime Minister and one of the most prominent leaders of Al-Nahda) declared AST a terrorist organisation, there was concern but not surprise. Indeed, since the demonstration in front of the American Embassy that degenerated into the assault on 15 September 2012,<sup>285</sup> security preoccupations have been prioritised over freedom of expression. One of the consequences of the unique climate of freedom that Tunisia had experienced for one and a half year following the fall of Ben Ali, was the strengthening of the tension between the people's right to freely express their political and religious beliefs, and the institutions' duty of safeguarding the general public interests. The jihadist phenomenon, because of the genuine security concerns it created, was considered the perfect scapegoat, providing the old authoritarian apparatus with an opportunity to return to the scene and take action. Although Tunisia seems today more mature for a democratic evolution, there is still the temptation, as occurred 20 years ago, to order the security apparatus to manage the social and political conflict. Change and continuity are the two key elements that explain these two co-existing tendencies towards, on the one side, open debate and, on the other side, repression, both of which have interfered in the ongoing transitional process.

---

<sup>282</sup> There is an on-going debate on whether the AST represents a specific social class or not. Although the AST members I met during my fieldwork do not generally recognise a specific social class background and dislike the term *muhammishun* (which is utilised to as a pejorative by the rest of society), there is no doubt that most of them come from specifically poor urban areas. Of course, as the Jihadi Salafi trend is an ideological one, virtually anyone could adopt it regardless of social class belonging. In fact, we are not using this category as a deterministic one. Attempts to reach more educated and middle class constituencies are strategically advanced by AST. However, the fact that it has been isolated after the crackdown, with no support by any other class but constituencies from lower class neighbourhoods, strongly suggests that up to now, AST's interclass reach is weak.

<sup>283</sup> Spending time in the *cafés* with friends is a widespread social activity in these neighbourhoods.

<sup>284</sup> Interview with a leader of Ansar al-Sharia, Tunis. Because he is under surveillance from the security forces, I cannot state either his name or the place of the interview.

<sup>285</sup> Sandro Luty, 'Un an après l'attaque de l'ambassade des Etats Unis à Tunis, les doutes subsistent' Huffington Post Maghreb, 14/9/2013. [http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2013/09/14/attaque-ambassade-etats-unis-tunis\\_n\\_3926696.html](http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2013/09/14/attaque-ambassade-etats-unis-tunis_n_3926696.html) (accessed 28/8/2014).

## Conclusion

The Tunisian democratic transition that began in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising is another step of a long process of state-building. The main actors of this process represent those political and social groups that emerged from the 1980s and struggled to participate in the management of national institutions, namely the liberals and the Islamists. But, as this article argues, further fragmentation has taken place and new social actors emerged in the aftermath of the revolution, along with the unfolding of the institution-building process. Indeed, the main contention of this article is that behind the political struggle there is class struggle. Sharing the ideology of *tunisianité*, the official national rhetoric invented by Bourguiba, implies accepting cultural references typical of a new middle class that appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century. *Tunisianité* was the mantra of Tunisian nationalism, and it was understood as a positive identity factor that pushed the middle class to assume the leadership of the nation-building process. This leadership had historically been the outcome of a political conflict, symbolised by the two characters of the liberation movement, Bourghiba and Ben Youssef.

The post-revolutionary process is also one of 'street politics,' in the sense of the participation of social movements not conventionally organised into civil society associations or political parties. Once again, we see factors of continuity and change overlapping. The concept of street politics is useful to explain the emergence of the Jihadi Salafist movement, which appeared during the transitional period as a new social and political actor. It represents a completely new generation that has little to no relation with the Islamic movement represented by today's moderate, Nahdaoui middle class. However, jihadism and radical Islamism represent in today's Tunisia those disenfranchised social classes which find themselves at the bottom of the social ladder. AST is also the largest social and youth movement on the national scene. It represents a factor of continuity in modern Tunisian history as it is the heir of radical Islamism, which was already present and repressed under Ben Ali's rule, but it also represents a rupture with this radical tradition. Thanks to the 2011 uprising, it had the opportunity to organise into a proper movement, occupying most of the public space in working class neighbourhoods of Tunisian biggest cities.

The nation-building process is the general framework in which factors associated with change and continuity take on an explanatory value in understanding the Tunisian transition. Ultimately, Tunisia's transitional process will only be accomplished when all social classes will find a way to express themselves without being perceived as threatening to the society and the state. This is not only a power struggle but also a process of class inclusion and exclusion.

## Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to the two anonymous reviewers for their comments and to the Gerda Henkel Foundation for its financial support in the context of the research programme 'Islam, the Modern Nation State and Transnational Movements.'

# Labour Demands, Regime Concessions: Moroccan Unions and the Arab Uprising

MATT BUEHLER<sup>286</sup>

*ABSTRACT This article investigates how public employee unions mobilised to take advantage of Morocco's Arab uprising. Leveraging their positions as operators of public institutions, these unionists exploited the unrest to strategically advance their interests. Two points emerge from this account of state-labour relations in Morocco. First, a spike in labour contestation began in early-2010, presaging the unrest that rocked Moroccan cities in 2011. Second, the unions secured their demands through traditional tactics of labour mobilisation—joining street protests, exaggerating material demands, and threatening negotiation walkouts. This strategy, however, became more efficacious during the Arab uprising. Fearing urban riots that had historically grown from labour protests since the 1980s, regime elites conceded to union demands, many of which they had previously rejected in the 2000s.*

Change and continuity became important keywords in academic research related to the Arab uprisings, and early studies connected them to either regime collapse or, on the contrary, regime survival. Initially cases of continuity were neglected because studying authoritarian persistence, the status quo, was less interesting than researching regime change, proto-democratisation—especially in light of ostensibly successful mobilisations in Tunisia and Egypt. Yet even in countries where protests did not force leaders from power, important micro-political changes did occur in a macro-political context of continuity. There were winners and losers, political actors that gained from the

---

<sup>286</sup> Department of Political Science, University of Tennessee. Email: mbuehle2@utk.edu



uprisings and those that lost. That is, even in cases of continuity like Morocco, the protests created opportunities for actors to seek and secure their interests, even though such unrest did not cause regime collapse.

One such political actor that asserted itself during the Arab uprisings was organised labour—members and leaders of trade unions. Across the Arab world, labour participated in the protests that gripped the region. In Tunisia, where the uprisings originated, unionists from the *Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail* (UGTT) mobilised alongside Mohammed Bouazizi's family and jobless youths in Sidi Bouzid, before protests spread to Gafsa and Gabès, and, finally, Tunis.<sup>287</sup> This unrest built upon previous instances of labour protest in Tunisia's interior provinces, especially an eight-day strike of phosphate miners in 2008.<sup>288</sup> After Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali had fled in January 2011, it became clear that the UGTT had played an important role in protests that facilitated his ouster. Egypt, likewise, witnessed an increase in labour protests beginning in the mid-2000s in response to effects of neo-liberal reforms of the 1990s. Indeed, while the number of labour protests hovered around 100 per year between 1998 and 2003, they nearly tripled between 2007 and 2011.<sup>289</sup> Once protests against Hosni Mubarak began, workers became the frontline of popular mobilisation against his rule. Joel Beinin<sup>290</sup> and Marie Duboc<sup>291</sup> suggest that the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions' endorsement of protests on 6 February prompted military defection from Mubarak.

In Arab states that experienced continuity and not change, unions participated in the protests that shook authoritarian rule. In Bahrain, workers in a Shia union allied with the opposition, *al-Wefaq*,

---

<sup>287</sup> Michele Penner-Angrist, 'Understanding the Success of Mass Civic Protest in Tunisia,' *The Middle East Journal* 67 (2013): 548.

<sup>288</sup> Larbi Choukiha and Vincent Geisser, 'Retour sur la révolte du bassin minier. Les cinq leçons politiques d'un conflit social inédit,' *L'Année du Maghreb*, 6 (2010): 5-10. Eric Gobe, 'The Gafsa Mining Basin Between Riots and a Social Movement,' *Institut de Recherches et d'Etudes sur le Monde Arabe et Musulman-IREMAM*, (2011), 11-20.

<sup>289</sup> Jason Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention: The Politics of the U.S.-Egyptian Alliance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 127-128.

<sup>290</sup> Joel Beinin, 'The Rise of Egypt's Workers,' *Carnegie Papers* (June 2012): 7-8.

<sup>291</sup> Marie Duboc, 'Challenging the Trade Union, Reclaiming the Nation', in Mehran Kamrava (ed.), *Beyond the Arab Spring: The Evolving Ruling Bargain in the Middle East* (London: Hurst, 2014): 245-246.

took to the streets. Over 4,500 unionists were fired for protesting.<sup>292</sup> In Jordan, members of professional syndicates—doctors and lawyers—joined protests organised by the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>293</sup> Although scholars have begun to recognise the role of unions especially in Tunisia<sup>294</sup> and Egypt,<sup>295</sup> few articles examine Morocco where the unrest of 2011 resulted in the resilience of monarchical rule. Unlike studies that concentrate on cases of change, this article analyses a case of continuity, Morocco, to show how unions exploited the unrest to strategically advance their material interests. Leveraging the instability of protests organised by youth activists (the February 20th Movement), the unions mobilised to secure the material demands of their members, predominately public employees—teachers, doctors, nurses, and government clerks. Drawing on a cache of Arabic primary documents from local newspapers and labour unions collected from fieldwork, I recount the events that ignited labour unrest among such public employees, and trace how negotiations proceeded between the unions and the regime. In doing this, the article investigates how labour syndicates used the unrest of 2011 to draw concessions from Morocco’s authoritarian regime, working to change unionists’ material conditions in a context of political continuity.

This article contributes two main points. First, Morocco’s syndicates utilised familiar tactics—joining street protests, exaggerating material demands, and threatening negotiation walkouts.

---

<sup>292</sup> Reese Erlich, ‘Bahrain Labor Unions Split over Uprising’, *Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting*, 13/12/ 2012, <http://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/bahrain-uprising-islamic-militant-labor-union-split-protest> (accessed 26/7/2014).

<sup>293</sup> Fida Adely, ‘The Emergence of a New Labor Movement in Jordan,’ *Middle East Report*, 264 (2012). <http://merip.org/mer/mer264/emergence-new-labor-movement-jordan> (accessed 18/9/2014).

<sup>294</sup> Sami Zemni, ‘From Socio-Economic Protest to National Revolt: The Labor Origins of the Tunisian Revolution,’ in Nouri Gana (ed.), *The Making of the Tunisian Revolution* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013): 127-146.

<sup>295</sup> Hesham Sallam, ‘Striking Back at Egyptian Workers,’ 259 *Middle East Report* (2011): 1-4. <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer259/striking-back-egyptian-workers> (accessed 18/9/2014). Joel Beinin, ‘Workers, Trade Unions, and Egypt’s Political Future’, *Middle East Research and Information Project* (2013), pp. 1-4; Dina Bishara, ‘The Power of Workers in Egypt’s 2011 Uprising,’ in Bahgat Korany and Rabab El-Mahdi (eds.), *The Arab Spring in Egypt: Revolution and Beyond* (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2012): 83-103.

Because of the instability of the Arab uprisings, however, these tactics of state-labour relations became especially effective: the regime exerted itself to placate union demands.<sup>296</sup>

The second point is more empirical, less theoretical. Tracing the sequenced history of labour mobilisation, this article demonstrates that union unrest augured youth-led demonstrations of spring 2011. In the first eight months of 2010, months before the outbreak of Tunisia's protests, labour strikes and demonstrations increased by eight per cent nationally in Morocco.<sup>297</sup> This statistic signifies that labour-organised protests, which epitomized discontent with the socio-economic status quo, presaged the demonstrations of the February 20th Movement. Demonstrating that union unrest, empirically, preceded Morocco's uprising suggests that the proliferation of social media applications, such as Facebook and Twitter, amplified underlying socio-economic frustration, but did not initiate unrest. This finding engages theories that identify social media as either, at most, a *cause* for the Arab uprisings or, at least, a *device* integral for collective action.<sup>298</sup>

Throughout the developing world, strikes from labour unions, generally, and public employees, specifically, have wrought instability in authoritarian regimes. Especially when such regimes refuse to give material concessions, unions have protested to threaten regime change. In South Korea, unionists mobilised against the regime in the 1980s on behalf of democratisation to secure laws that increased private sector wages.<sup>299</sup> Over 10 years, their strikes raised wages by 250 per cent; British unionists achieved similar gains over 70 years.<sup>300</sup> In Brazil, public employee unions mobilised to bring about a new regime that pledged to increase their autonomy and their members' wages. When the new state led by José Sarney cut public salaries, the public employees struck to cause a

---

<sup>296</sup>The 'regime' is defined not only as Morocco's elected government, headed by loyalist Prime Minister Abbas el-Fassi (2007-2011), but also the palace and royal advisors. It may oversimplify to treat them as one, but, in practical terms, they jointly decide whether to offer concessions to labour unions.

<sup>297</sup>'irtifaa'a 'adad al-idrabaat fi sinah 2010 binisbah 8 fi al-miah muqaarinah bisinah', *al-massae* 1285 (11/8/2010): 8.

<sup>298</sup> Examples: Marc Lynch, 'After Egypt: The Limits and Promise of Online Challenges to the Authoritarian Arab State,' *Perspective on Politics* 9, 2 (2011): 306; Philip Howard and Muzzamil Hussain, 'The Role of Digital Media,' *Journal of Democracy* 22, 3 (2011): 35-48.

<sup>299</sup> Eva Bellin, 'Contingent Democrats: Industrialists, Labor, and Democratization in Late-Developing Countries,' *World Politics* 52, 2 (2000): 201.

<sup>300</sup> Alice Amsden, 'South Korea's Record Wage Rates,' *Industrial Relations* 29 (1990): 81.

‘paralysis of essential public services’.<sup>301</sup> In Poland, likewise, public employees—especially in education and healthcare—supported the Gdańsk shipbuilders who struck for democratisation.<sup>302</sup> Counting strikes in Eastern Europe between 1989 and 1993, one study calculated that public employee unions were ‘the most protest-prone’ labour group, rallying members to defend their material interests during democratisation.<sup>303</sup> Unions, especially those of public employees, are what Eva Bellin terms ‘contingent democrats’, ready to protest if regimes do not acquiesce to their material demands.<sup>304</sup>

in Morocco, public employees have spearheaded labour mobilisations. Without such unionists, the regime’s core institutions—schools, hospitals, courts, ministries, and municipalities—would not function. They are integral to implementing its policies and programs. That is, public employees who strike or protest do not, like private sector unionists, reduce firm profits. Their stoppages, by contrast, cut into the political capital of regimes, which accrue it over time with citizens through the consistent and successful provision of public services. Strikes from public employees threaten regimes because they endanger their ‘ruling bargain’ with citizens, who expect consistency in service delivery in a trade for political loyalty.<sup>305</sup>

A question remains, however. Why would a regime take public employee unions’ threats to strike seriously? Such threats may be cheap-talk without the backing of labour muscle in street protests. Because of a historical continuity in Moroccan politics, the regime could tell that these strike threats of 2011 were credible. This continuity is that urban violence has often been associated with (and grown from) such labour mobilisations. In most instances, unions did not organise urban violence intentionally. Rather, the unions’ mobilisations—strikes, protests, and marches—created opportunities for such unrest to outburst, conjuring latent violence from some of urban society’s

---

<sup>301</sup> Guillermo O’Donnell, ‘On the State, Democratization and Some Conceptual Problems,’ *World Development* 21, 8 (1993): 1362.

<sup>302</sup> David Ost, *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 94-95.

<sup>303</sup> Grzegorz Ekiert and Jan Kubik, ‘Contentious Politics in New Democracies,’ *World Politics* 50, 4 (1998): 558.

<sup>304</sup> Bellin, ‘Contingent Democrats,’ cit., 175-205.

<sup>305</sup> Mehran Kamrava, *The Modern Middle East* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2005): 213-214.

most marginalised groups. Beginning with French colonialism and continuing until today, such groups—slum dwellers, uprooted migrants, and the unemployed lumpenproletariat—have bandwagoned onto union-organised protests, increasing their size and surliness. Many labour protests began peacefully but ended violently, transforming into riots that spun out of control. In 1988, William Zartman coined the term the ‘anomic threat’ to describe how these marginalised groups, if given the opportunity to join labour mobilisations, could wreak instability.<sup>306</sup> By recognising that their protests could provoke such semi-spontaneous violence, labour unions gained the ability to not only *strike* but also *threaten to strike* to elicit concessions from the regime. Regime leaders, in response, mollified union anger and reduced opportunities for such urban riots to outburst.

This article proceeds as follows. First, I establish a baseline by showing that, since colonialism, urban riots have accompanied labour mobilisations in Morocco, helping unions garner concessions. This tactic originated with protests against French imperialists in the 1930s and continued until the end of King Hassan II’s reign in 1999. Second, I demonstrate how a spike in union unrest developed in Morocco in early 2010, and, then, how these labour protests continued in spring 2011 during the Arab uprisings. Third, I explain how unions used state-labour negotiations in April 2011, what was known as the ‘social dialogue’ (*al-hiwar al-ijtima’i*), to force concessions from the regime and its loyalist Prime Minister, Abbas el-Fassi. To conclude, I discuss why these concessions should be considered a victory for the unions and *not* a strategy of co-optation executed by the regime. What is clear is that although the Arab uprisings did not alter Morocco’s macro-politics, preserving the continuity of monarchical rule, unions drove change in its micro-politics. By recognising that the threat of their mobilisations could incite urban riots, the syndicates won

---

<sup>306</sup> William Zartman, ‘Opposition as Support of the State’, *Beyond Coercion* (New York: Croom-Helm, 1988), 71. Also: Paola Rivetti, ‘Continuity and change before and after the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco. Regime reconfiguration and policy-making in North Africa’, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, 1 (2015).

major material demands of public employees, including better monthly wages, retirement pensions, and professional promotions.

### **Union Unrest and Urban Riots, 1930s-2000s**

Since colonialism, labour mobilisations have provoked urban violence that has prompted Morocco's non-democratic overlords, whether French officials or regime elites, to grant material concessions. In 1943, Morocco's first union emerged—the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (or 'CGT'). The CGT developed from a coalition of European and Moroccan workers, often members of the French Communist Party. Coordinating in a series of strikes in the 1930s, these workers had won concessions from the French authorities. One strike, of over 4,000 workers in the public phosphate mines, led to higher wages, better working conditions, and a 48-hour work week.<sup>307</sup> Similar labour protests erupted in later years, in Fes, Casablanca, Meknes, and Khouribga, and especially in the sectors of railroads, postal services, and phosphate mining. Even during this early era, public employees—phosphate miners, railroad conductors, and postal clerks—provided the labour movement's core.

As calls for national independence intensified in the late 1940s, some Europeans feared the influence of Moroccans within the CGT. They tried to exclude them from the syndicate but failed.<sup>308</sup> Not all Moroccans, likewise, thought that locals and Europeans should cooperate within the same union. Over time, these nationalists changed their opinions after realising what street power the union possessed. It could channel discontent of the urban masses to expedite independence, and consequently the fight for the control of the CGT reflected the national struggle for independence. In 1951, the first Moroccan Muslim became Secretary General of the CGT and

---

<sup>307</sup> Jean-Francois Clement and Jim Paul, 'Trade Unions and Moroccan Politics', *MERIP Reports* (October 1984), 21.

<sup>308</sup> Abd al-Jalil Abumajed, *al-niqabaat bilmaghrib*, (Casablanca: Ouragan Communication, 2008): 20-21.

later, Morocco's king publicly acknowledged the unionists' role in resisting French hegemony, declaring them a 'distinguished vanguard' in the nationalist struggle.<sup>309</sup>

Events of the 1950s showed how the unionists earned the king's 'vanguard' moniker by launching protests to force the withdrawal of French forces. On May Day 1951, the unionists organised a large protest in which they tussled with the colonial police in Casablanca. Next, in December 1952, Morocco's unionists responded with more force, organising a march in Casablanca to protest the assassination of a Tunisian labour leader. The night prior, nationalist leaders told unionists to 'gather weapons' and, at the march's end, the unionists attacked the colonial police with axes and clubs.<sup>310</sup> Because the union's protest had attracted malcontents from throughout Casablanca who were drawn into the march, it transformed into a riot, leading to the death of hundreds.

On 20 March 1955, Moroccan unionists declared their independence from the CGT, founding the *Union Marocaine du Travail* (UMT). The UMT was the first union autonomous from European leadership, and played a crucial role expelling French imperialists. The union claimed control over 650,000 workers,<sup>311</sup> though its membership likely numbered around 576,000.<sup>312</sup> This number exceeded those for Algeria, Tunisia, and Mauritania, where 200,000, 150,000, and 45,000 workers unionised, respectively.<sup>313</sup> From the year it was established, 1955, until the year of independence, 1956, the UMT organized 1,987 separate protests that mobilised 76,486 workers.<sup>314</sup> The unions' ability to organize large-scale strikes and protests, which rallied the urban masses to the nationalist cause, expedited Morocco's independence to which the French conceded in November 1956.

---

<sup>309</sup> Joseph Salazar, 'Mohamed V: The Tangiers Speech,' *African Yearbook of Rhetoric* 2,3 (2001): 23.

<sup>310</sup> Daniel Zisenwine, *The Emergence of Nationalist Politics in Morocco* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010): 206-208.

<sup>311</sup> Egbal Ahmad, 'Trade Unionism', in Carl L. Brown (ed.), *State and Society in Independent North Africa* (Baltimore: The Middle East Institute, 1966): 175.

<sup>312</sup> Clement Henry Moore, *Politics in North Africa: Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia* (Boston: Little Brown, 1970): 175-194.

<sup>313</sup> Moore, *Politics in North Africa*, cit., 175-194; Anthony Pazzanita, *Historical Dictionary of Mauritania* (Lanham: Scarecrow, 1996): 275.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid. Moore, 193.

Independence, however, did not realise all labour demands. Although power had been transferred to Moroccans, the material conditions of unionists remained dire, as under colonialism. Between 1956 and 1957, the unions launched 542 different strikes to vocalise their discontent.<sup>315</sup> The main stronghold of labour was public employees, whose wages had been frozen after independence. Early statistics indicated that such public employees constituted about 38 per cent of UMT unionists.<sup>316</sup> In June 1961, such functionaries spearheaded a nation-wide strike that called for wage increases and legal protections for workers within the new constitution.

Recognising unionists' role in the independence struggle, and responding to their strikes, the regime conceded to public employees' demands and added pro-labour laws to the 1962 constitution. These laws created labour complaint courts, restricted work of children, created a minimum wage, and established an agency to enforce wage agreements.<sup>317</sup> Socialists within the elected government, like Mehdi Ben Barka, had pushed for unionist priorities in the constitution. When these socialists left the elected government, they created a party with close ties to the UMT. The socialists advanced unionist interests in parliament, whereas the unionists mobilised socialist voters in elections. Because of rivalries between socialist and union leaders, however, the two organisations parted ways in 1963. Realising that losing UMT support hurt politically, the socialists would ally with other unions—the *Confédération Démocratique du Travail* (CDT) and the *Fédération Démocratique du Travail* (FDT)—in later decades.

Beginning in 1964, Morocco's economy declined—a result of low phosphate prices and few non-phosphate exports. Reacting, the regime cut spending, shrinking salaries for public employees and reducing budgets for public institutions. In January 1965, teachers affiliated with the UMT initiated protests in Morocco's major cities, with Casablanca as the epicentre of the labour mobilisation. Discontent with recent economic changes, about 10,000 unemployed workers and

---

<sup>315</sup> Clement and Paul, 'Trade Unions,' cit., 21.

<sup>316</sup> Douglas Ashford, *Political Change in Morocco* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961): 280-281.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid. Ahmad, 174.



students joined the teachers' demonstration in Casablanca, increasing its intensity and ballooning its size.<sup>318</sup> The peaceful protestors turned into violent rioters. Fearing the urban riot might threaten the regime's stability, the king issued orders to repress the riot, leading to the death of over 400. Subsequently the regime imposed a state of emergency and rescinded many of the spending cuts, hoping to pre-empt future unrest.

Because Morocco's constitution guarantees freedom to form unions, several new ones sprang up in the 1970s—despite the state of emergency. Often unions affiliated with political parties, like the *Istiqlal's Union Générale des Travailleurs du Maroc* (UGTM) and the Islamists' *Union Nationale du Travail au Maroc* (UNTM). 'It became fashionable', as Clement Henry describes, for all parties to create 'union appendages'.<sup>319</sup> The parties experienced difficulty mobilising the urban masses, and realised that the unions—with their grassroots influence—could exert pressure on the regime through strikes and protests in ways the parties never could alone.

In 1979, unionists again mobilised after the state of emergency, which continued until 1977. When Morocco's trade deficit increased unexpectedly, the regime responded by implementing austerity measures to boost exports and lower wages. Protesting these decisions, which increased prices of basic goods through subsidy reductions, a new labour union formed—the CDT. Through organising strikes, especially among public employees of education, mines, and railways, the CDT and other unions pressured the elected government to raise wages to compensate for price increases. When the strikes of these unionists grew larger, and attracted sympathizers from the urban masses, then the regime dispersed them violently. Initially, the regime refused to concede and, when the unionists took to the streets in Casablanca, the police responded by jailing 688 unionists, firing 708 teachers, and dismissing 178 healthcare workers. However, sensing that labour mobilisation was increasing, the prime minister issued a legal concession to forestall conflict. After consulting royal

---

<sup>318</sup> David Seddon, 'The Politics of Adjustment in Morocco,' in Bonnie Campbell and John Loxley, eds., *Structural Adjustment in Africa* (London: MacMillan, 1989): 241.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid. Moore, 184.

advisors, he acquiesced by raising the minimum wage of such workers by 30 per cent.<sup>320</sup> Through their strikes, and the threat that the urban masses might join them, the unions garnered concessions from the regime.

1979, however, was not the end of the labour unrest. The syndicates mobilised again in 1981, what would become one of Morocco's bloodiest urban riots. That May, the regime eliminated a series of price controls, causing living costs to increase dramatically. On 18 June, the UMT called a citywide strike in Casablanca, and, the next day, the CDT ordered a nationwide strike. On 21 June, a protest of unionists occurred in Casablanca—the march advanced through shantytowns and collected a following of malcontents, who transformed it into a mob riot. For four days, the rioters destroyed property, ransacked stores, and attacked 'symbols of public authority' until the army intervened, killing 645 and injuring thousands.<sup>321</sup> Victims were buried in seven mass graves, hidden until 2005. The regime also repressed unionists. Leaders from all of the unions were arrested but those of the CDT were targeted, with 100 of its provincial bosses imprisoned.<sup>322</sup> Although the unionists had paid a high price, their strike achieved its aims—most price controls were reinstated. From the riots of 1981, Morocco's regime learned that unionists harboured grievances with the economic system and would enlist the support of the urban masses to force concessions.

In 1984, protests organised by students in response to World Bank austerity measures spread throughout the country and lasted for about two weeks, becoming violent when they reached urban areas. Over 400 protestors died. Most deaths occurred in Nador and Tétouan, two marginalised cities in Morocco's northeast. By contrast, Casablanca and Rabat—areas with many public employees and other unionists—were quiet. After the 1979 and 1981 riots, the unions had according to David Seddon 'worked out a compromise with the government' and, hence, felt little

---

<sup>320</sup> Seddon 'Winter of Discontent,' *Middle East Report* (1984): 4, <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer127/winter-discontent> (accessed 18/9/2014).

<sup>321</sup> John Entelis, *Culture and Counterculture in Moroccan Politics* (New York: Westview Press, 1989): 92-93.

<sup>322</sup> Entelis, *Culture and Counterculture*, cit., 93.

reason to support the student protests.<sup>323</sup> The regime had raised the salaries of public employees while, concurrently, it had implemented other austerity measures, like increasing school fees (which had ignited the riots). Although the unions had won greater concessions when their protests attracted the support of the urban masses, that relationship was neither automatic nor reciprocal. The unions used the support of the lumpenproletariat but would not, necessarily, give it in return.

In the 1990s the World Bank, again, pressured the regime to implement reforms. Over 112 state-owned industries were opened to private investors.<sup>324</sup> The combination of new efficiencies with import competition eliminated factory jobs, reducing the number of unionists in manufacturing.<sup>325</sup> Structural adjustment of the 1990s weakened Morocco's labour movement, especially in manufacturing.

Reforms occurred to public sector services, though less substantially. Foreign companies began rubbish collection, water management, and electricity delivery in Casablanca, Tangier, and several other cities. Despite these changes, however, the hiring of public employees did not abate and, by the 1990s, their salaries constituted over half of the national budget's total expenditures.<sup>326</sup> Salaries for public employees within local governments, specifically, became the budget's largest expenditure, surpassing even military spending.<sup>327</sup> Public employee unionists benefited from reticence to fully privatise public services, which necessitated more hiring—this meant new recruits to bolster unions.

Unions vocalised opposition to privatisation of public services in a showdown with the regime on 14 December 1990. Demanding higher wages as compensation, the CDT and other unions called a national strike, planning protests in urban areas—Tangier, Marrakech, Meknes, and Fes. In

---

<sup>323</sup> Seddon, 'Riot and Rebellion in North Africa,' in Berch Berberoglu (ed.), *Power and Stability in the Middle East* (London: Zed Books, 1989): 115-118.

<sup>324</sup> Myriam Catusse, *Le Temps des entrepreneurs: Politique et transformations du capitalisme au Maroc* (Paris: Larose, 2008).

<sup>325</sup> Laetitia Cairoli, 'Garment Factory Workers in the City of Fez,' *Middle East Journal* 53, 1 (1999): 29.

<sup>326</sup> Guilaïn Denoeux, 'Morocco's Economic Prospects: Daunting Challenges Ahead,' *Middle East Policy* 2 (2001): 75-77.

<sup>327</sup> 'maouraad al-hasabaat', *Majalat al-aouaal* (2/4/2011): 22.

Fes, CDT-affiliated teachers organised the initial demonstration, which was peaceful. It evolved into a riot, as Susan Waltz describes, when it was 'fed by the outrage' of restless youth and uprooted migrants who 'were frustrated in their attempts to find decent employment'.<sup>328</sup> For two days, 20,000 rioters swarmed the streets, causing \$15 million in damage. Unrest had grown violent because, in preceding months, real incomes of Fes families had dropped by nearly 30 per cent.<sup>329</sup> The union mobilisation provided the opportunity for the outburst of this urban discontent, with violent consequences.<sup>330</sup> Like in 1981, the regime punished the unionists for the riot. Fearing that imprisoning labour leaders might reignite violence, the regime stalled in confronting them directly. Using a controversial newspaper interview the CDT leader had given as a pretext, regime authorities imprisoned him for two years beginning in April 1992.<sup>331</sup>

Again, however, urban violence that had grown from union protests produced material results. Ten days after the Fes riots, the king called upon the elected government to devise concessions that would alleviate discontent. The minimum wage was increased by 15 per cent. Regime leaders opened negotiations with the unions and agreed, by February 1991, to accede to additional material demands and new 'social allowances', including raising state salaries and hiring more public employees.<sup>332</sup>

When the socialists entered elected government in 1998, the unions initially benefited when their new prime minister promulgated a pro-worker labour code. Yet, the socialists did little else to resolve the socio-economic frustration felt by the unionists or the urban masses. Beginning in the 2000s, this angst began to boil over with protests occurring in dozens of medium-sized towns with

---

<sup>328</sup> Susan Waltz, *Human Rights and Reform: Changing the Face of North African Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995): 128.

<sup>329</sup> George Joffé, 'Elections and Reform in Morocco,' in Richard Gillespie (ed.), *Mediterranean Politics: Volume 1* (London: Pinter, 1994): 223.

<sup>330</sup> Ellen Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World* (New York: Cambridge, 2005): 134-135.

<sup>331</sup> Waltz, *Human Rights and Reform*, cit., 128.

<sup>332</sup> Abdellatif Moutadayene, 'Economic Crises and Democratization in Morocco,' *Journal of North African Studies* 6,3 (2001): 82.

low public investment, notably Bouarfa, Sefrou, and Sidi Ifni.<sup>333</sup> Diverging over these protests, Rabat-based labour leaders called for patience hoping for socialist-led reforms, whereas provincial bosses encouraged unionists to protest. Working alongside civil society activists who protested for rights of political detainees and against rising living costs, local unionists in these towns mobilised. Often, a union office was a space of coordination in which these oppositional actors convened, planned a march route, and departed *ensemble*.<sup>334</sup> In Bouarfa, over 10,000 citizens protested in May 2007. In Sefrou, street protests in September 2007 vocalised anger at reductions in bread subsidies. In Sidi Ifni, local unionists protested with unemployed graduates who blockaded the port. Although the regime neither met all of the demands of these towns' protestors or local unionists, it offered limited concessions to calm the unrest—free water in Bouarfa, new price controls in Sefrou, and funds to spur employment in Sidi Ifni. Afraid to estrange their socialist allies, labour leaders did not endorse these protests of the 2000s. By 2007, however, the unions became disillusioned that they could collaborate with the socialists in formal politics to implement reform.

### **Union Demands, Regime Reticence: 2007-2009**

Because of their government's unfulfilled policy promises, the socialists lost seats in the 2007 elections and became a junior partner in the cabinet, retaining few ministries. The elections brought to power a loyalist prime minister with an aristocratic pedigree, Abbas al-Fassi. Few anticipated he would take labour concerns of economic inequality seriously.

In Fassi's first months in office, these expectations were confirmed when his administration offered a reform package, which would have increased wages by 10 per cent over three years.

---

<sup>333</sup> Koen Bogaert, 'The Revolt of Small Towns: The Meaning of Morocco's History and Geography of Social Protests,' *African Political Economy* (2014): 9. Karine Bennafla and Badimon Emperador, 'Le Maroc Inutile. Redécouvert par l'action publique: les cas de Sidi Ifni et Bouarfa,' *Politique Africaine* 120 (2010) : 73-78.

<sup>334</sup> Bogaert and Emperador, 'Imaging the State through Social Protest: State Reformation of Unemployed Graduates in Morocco,' *Mediterranean Politics* 16, 2 (2011): 250.

Rejecting the offer, the syndicates criticised it as meagre given that living costs rose 16 per cent annually. Moreover, the unions' calls for reforms for retirement pensions and the promotion system went unanswered in Fassi's proposal.<sup>335</sup> Fassi's meagre proposal became even stingier after the 2008 financial crisis, however. With fewer European tourists and phosphate exports, Morocco's tax revenues declined and its national debt (as a percentage of gross domestic product) soared—from 47.3 in 2008 to 56.8 by 2011. Facing these serious economic problems, the Fassi administration retracted its plan to consider increasing public salaries.

Not only macro-economic conditions but also internal infighting obstructed the unions from securing their material demands. In the UMT, Morocco's largest union, a struggle developed between the syndicate's bureaucratic leadership and its radical members, who wanted the former to be more assertive. In the FDT, a politician who aspired to be the socialist party's president interfered in the union's internal elections. 77 unionists opposed him, drafting a protest petition.<sup>336</sup> In the UNTM, the Islamists' union, a dispute developed between two leaders—Mohamed Yatim and Abdelssalam al-Ma'ati. The latter sued the former for allegedly misusing union funds. Ma'ati's lawsuit was a ploy to take over the union: The 'basic issue', one unionist explained, was that Yatim's faction 'controlled the union, and the other wing didn't have a foothold in it'.<sup>337</sup> What these internal conflicts indicated was that the unions were in bargaining position of weakness, not of strength, *vis-à-vis* the regime. As labour unrest escalated before the Arab uprising, however, this changed: A window of opportunity opened in which unions could press for their demands and, ultimately, secure new concessions.

## Morocco's Mobilisation: Union Unrest in the Arab Uprising

---

<sup>335</sup> Jawad Ghasaal, 'al-hiwaar al-ijtima' ai yatajhu nahou al-baab al-masdoud', *at-Tajdid* 1430 (15/7/2009): 3.

<sup>336</sup> Youssef Esskat, 'fadrilayioun yutaaliboun al-itihaad biraf'a al-yad 'an markazitihim', *as-Sabah* 3381 (24/2/2011): 3.

<sup>337</sup> Ismaa'il Rawahi, 'Tajmeed al-hisaab al-banki liniqaabat al-itihaad al-watani lilshugal', *as-Sabah* 3285 (11/2/2011): 8.

Drawing inspiration from Egypt and Tunisia, where labour protests had spiked in the late 2000s, Morocco's public employee unions began to mobilise to assert their demands. Overcoming their infighting, they prepared to use their positions as operators of public institutions to elicit concessions from Morocco's regime. Morocco's regime feared not only the stoppages in the provision of public services that would result from strikes but also the urban riots that had grown from such labour mobilisations in the past.

In the first eight months of 2010, months before the Arab uprising began in Tunisia, labour strikes and protests increased in Morocco by eight per cent nationwide.<sup>338</sup> Workers struck in 139 different public offices, including ministries, municipalities, schools, hospitals, and courts. Over 18,453 workers mobilised, which often included occupying their desks, shutting down all activity at their workstations, and holding rallies at their offices.<sup>339</sup> Early strikes included one on 26 October 2010 at Morocco's public television station, in which journalists protested over rumours of privatisation. A second important mobilisation occurred on 3 and 4 November 2010 when public employees called a nationwide strike. The unions achieved an 85 per cent participation rate in which public employees occupied their desks and workstations, halting all activity for 48 hours.<sup>340</sup> In some provinces, such as Oriental, participation rates climbed to 93 per cent.<sup>341</sup> However unlike past instances of labour mobilisation, in which the regime had conceded to union demands, the regime resisted. On 17 December 2010, Morocco's Minister of Finance asserted that the decision to raise wages laid 'in the hands of the government' and 'not in those of anybody else'.<sup>342</sup> Alluding to the Fassi administration's earlier offer to increase wages which the unions had rejected, the

---

<sup>338</sup> Ibid. 'irtifaa'a', *al-massae* (1285): 8.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid. 'irtifaa'a', *al-massae* (1285): 8.

<sup>340</sup> 'Grève: guerre des chiffres et des mots', *Telquel* (6-12/10/2010): 8.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid. *Telquel*, 8.

<sup>342</sup> Jamal Bourfisi, 'Mezouar: al-hakouma layst must'ada lilraf'a al-ujour', *as-Sabah* 3322 (17/12/2010): 1.

minister emphasized that now, for the 2011 budget, there were more important priorities—roads, water, and electricity.<sup>343</sup>

As public unrest increased in Egypt and Tunisia in January 2011, Morocco's unions used this atmosphere to ratchet up pressure on the Fassi administration. Announced the last week of December 2010, the syndicates organised public employees for a 72-hours strike—8 to 10 January 2011—across all government offices. Public employees hoped that their stoppages would convince the regime to concede, seeking to avoid disruption in public service delivery and urban riots that could emerge from such protests. Appearing on public television, the Islamist union's chief criticised the Fassi administration for its unwillingness to increase benefits for unionists. He held Fassi 'fully responsible' for the escalating labour unrest. Fassi had shown no 'desire to steer the social dialogue toward tangible benefits' for public employees, he asserted.<sup>344</sup> Nationally, over 80 per cent of public workers joined the strike. Strike participation was highest in Sidi Ifni and Safi where 95 and 90 per cent of public employees, respectively, ceased working. On 10 January, the strike concluded with a large public protest in front of the Ministry of Public Works in Rabat, where 1,000 unionists delivered a statement to the prime minister in which they demanded that he 'abide by previous agreements from negotiations'.<sup>345</sup> The statement also asserted other union demands—extra compensation for public employees in remote communities, reforms for the promotion system, and wage increases to create a minimum wage of 3,500 dirhams per month (\$430.00).<sup>346</sup>

Other unionised workers mobilised in solidarity with public employees throughout January 2011. The phosphate miners' union, a syndicate historically known for its militancy, struck on 28 January to protest the regime's noncompliance with labour law 6500, which mandated health insurance and

---

<sup>343</sup> Ibid. Bourfisi, 1.

<sup>344</sup> Khaled al-Suti, 'al-niqaa bi Mohamed Yatime yuhamal al-hakouma masoul al-idrabaat wa al-ihjiqaan al-ijtimaa' ai', *at-Tajdid* 2565 (28-30/1/2011): 3.

<sup>345</sup> 'niqabaat kafathat idrabaat wataniyyah fi al-t'aliym wa al-sahah wa al-damaan al-ijtimaa' ai wa al-qataa' aaat aukhrah', *as-Sabah* 3369 (10/2/2011): 1.

<sup>346</sup> Hajar al-Maghli, 'nijah al-idrabaat bilwathifah al-'aumumiha faaq 80 fi al-miah', *as-Sabah* 3369 (10/2/2011): 5.



retirement pensions for miners.<sup>347</sup> Tax collectors struck for 48-hours on 30 and 31 of January, wanting to vocalise ‘collective grievances’ and defend ‘the right of employees to express their discontent’.<sup>348</sup> Fruit and vegetable vendors in Casablanca’s open-air bazar also struck, rallying in solidarity for the public employees.<sup>349</sup> Reacting to surging domestic labour unrest, and increasing instability in neighbouring Arab states, the prime minister announced his interest in a dialogue with the unions, though his plans were inchoate: Neither a meeting date was chosen nor its agenda set.<sup>350</sup> Concerns arose that such protests—if left unchecked—could spiral out of control because unions would draw the urban masses into the fray, like labour unrest of 1981 and 1990.

Beginning on 20 February 2011, protests sprang up across Morocco organised by the country’s youth movement, the February 20th Movement for Change. Protests occurred in 53 different cities with 238,000 participants. Casablanca and Rabat saw the largest mobilisations where 16,000 and 8,000 protestors, respectively, took to the streets. Demonstrations repeated in March and April but declined in May, June, and July.<sup>351</sup> In some cities marginalised by the regime, such as Hoceima, Tangier, Larache, protests featured fewer participants but were violent, leading to 5 protestor deaths, 128 protestor injuries, and 107 destroyed buildings.<sup>352</sup>

Pressuring the Fassi administration to open negotiations, Morocco’s labour unions endorsed the demonstrations of 20th February; unionists flooded the protests. Unionists held signs that criticized the king’s economic counsellor, Mounir Majidi, and called for the nationalization of royal business conglomerates, like the *Societe Nationale d’Investissement*.<sup>353</sup> As the mainstay of the crown’s private fortunes, such conglomerates control businesses in many economic sectors, including such

---

<sup>347</sup> Ihssane Elhafidi, ‘niqaabat al-phosphat taftah malaf al-taghtiyya al-sahaiyya bilqataa’a’, *as-Sabah* 3358 (28/1/2011): 4.

<sup>348</sup> ‘niqaba maaliyya talouh bilidraab limudat 48 saa’aa’, *al-masasae* 1354 (29-30/1/2011) : 3.

<sup>349</sup> Said Boukazoul, ‘naqabaat bisouk al-jumla tad’aou ila idraab khilal maars’, 3382, *as-Sabah* (15/2/2011): 5.

<sup>350</sup> Ihssane Elhafidi, ‘al-wazir al-aoual yatadakhil liwaqif al-ihitiqaan al-ijtimaa’i’, *as-Sabah* 3367 (8/2/2011): 2.

<sup>351</sup> Youssef Akdim et. al. ‘Ça ne fait que commencer...’, *Telquel* 462 (26/2/2011): 19.

<sup>352</sup> Mustapha Seimi, ‘La Grande Peur’, *Maroc Hebdo International*, (24/2/2011): 21.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid. Akdim et. al., 21.

enterprises as the country's largest bank, *AttijariWafa Bank*, and its biggest dairy producer, *Centrale Laitière*. Although the activists of the February 20th Movement were the organisers of the protests, and the unionists were only participants, the latter used them as an opportunity to assert their material demands to the regime. While Morocco's protests did not reach the size of those in Tunisia and Egypt, they did cause considerable unrest and posed a threat to stability unseen since the urban riots of the 1980s.

### **Eliciting Concessions: State-Labour Negotiations of April 2011**

To resolve the spike in labour strikes of 2010, and prevent the urban riots that may have grown from the protests of spring 2011, Fassi announced on 21 February 2011 that state-labour negotiations would be opened. According to one local journalist, the regime sought 'social peace at any price', and would likely concede to union demands to placate their anger.<sup>354</sup> Held in April 2011, these talks were known as the 'social dialogue' and involved regime representatives (a Fassi negotiation team) and four unions—the UMT, FDT, UGTM, and UNTM. Manoeuvring to enhance its bargaining position, the Fassi team announced that talks would begin on 5 April after a cooling-off period.

Union anger did not subside, however; unionists continued protests between March 23 and 31. In front of Parliament, unemployed graduates staged a sit-in. Beside the Ministry of Health, medical professionals protested for better compensation and promotions.<sup>355</sup> Teachers organised the most important demonstration, which became 'the largest teachers' protest in Moroccan history'. Unionized teachers descended on the Ministry of Education on 26 March 2011. Over a thousand teachers arrived to assert their demands, but, unlike the protests of February in which policemen had shown restraint, they lashed out this time: Over 65 teachers suffered injuries; one died from

---

<sup>354</sup> Youssef Akdim, 'La Paix Sociale à tout prix', *Telquel* 461 (19-25/2/2011): 30.

<sup>355</sup> Mohamed Belqaasim, 'tasaa'ad al-ihitjaajaat al-ijtimaaiyya bilrabat', *at-Tajdid* 2604 (25-27/3/2011): 3.

head wounds.<sup>356</sup> One teacher condemned the regime's brutality in a newspaper editorial, asserting that 'we must defend the dignity of teachers' and remember these 'flagrant abuses of human rights'.<sup>357</sup>

Reacting to assaults on unionists, and seeking to improve their bargaining positions with the regime, the syndicates released statements in early April 2011 before negotiations began. The unions pressured the regime, threatening to recommence protests if their material demands were not met. The UNTM's Secretary General declared that the Fassi administration must give 'tangible answers to core labour demands, and, principally, wage increases'.<sup>358</sup> The FDT's chief emphasised that 'the government *must* give signals regarding wage increases and professional promotions' to calm strikers.<sup>359</sup> The CDT boycotted the social dialogue: 'The regime', it stressed, delayed negotiations through 'forming committees' and 'debating the meeting agenda'.<sup>360</sup> Once state-labour negotiations began, the CDT's boycott exerted pressure on the regime from the outside while the other unions asserted their demands from the inside. The first two rounds of talks—held on 5 and 7 of April—produced no tangible results, because regime negotiators had not prepared a package of concessions for labour.

The unions moved next, wrenching the wrist of their negotiation partner—the Fassi administration. In the middle of negotiations, the Islamist union stormed out of the meeting room. In a press conference, the unionists asserted that the Fassi administration had declined 'to come to the meeting with projects or proposals' to satisfy the unions.<sup>361</sup> The government refused to offer 'answers to union demands', especially regarding issues of wage increases and professional

---

<sup>356</sup> Khaled al-Suti, 'nisaa wa rijaal al-t'alim yandadoun biltadakhalaat al-aminiyyah', *at-Tajdid* 2608 (31/3/2011): 1.

<sup>357</sup> Rachid Jarmouni, 'dafa' an 'an karaamat nissa wa rijaal al-t'atim', *at-Tajdid* 2606 (29/3/2011): 7.

<sup>358</sup> Mohamed Yatim, 'al-itihaad al-watani lilshugal bilmaghreb yahthur min al-rajou'a bilhiwar al-ijtima' ai', 2609 (1-3/4/2011): 3.

<sup>359</sup> H. Dades, 'Ça bloque sur les augmentations de salaires, les retraites...' *Le Reporter* (14/4/2011): 28-29.

<sup>360</sup> M. Bin Sidi and A. Bin'abaad, 'al-hiwar al-ijtima' ai yantaliq wa al-Amaoui ya-qaata', *maghreb al-youm* (08-14/4/2011): 16.

<sup>361</sup> Murad Thaabi, 'insihaab wafd al-itihaad al-watani lilshugal bilmaghreb min jalisat al-hiwaar al-ijtima' ai bisubub khalifaat bayna al-niqabaat wa al-hakouma', *al-massae* 1414 (09-10/4/2011): 3.

promotions. By walking out of the social dialogue, the Islamist unionists signalled to the regime that, if their demands were not met, they would recommence protests and join the CDT in boycott. Fearful that a union walkout might ignite new urban unrest, Fassi's negotiation team drafted concessions on 9 April 2011. Changes were proposed for the minimum wage, retirement pensions, and professional promotions, yet their details were unclear. The minimum wage would be raised beginning in July 2011 from 2,110 dirhams per month (about \$260.00) by 500 dirhams (\$62.00) for public employees. Reforms to the pension and promotion systems were left vague, though the Fassi team agreed to freeze the income tax at 38 per cent.

Rather than accepting Fassi's package of concessions, however, the unions rejected it. Given regional instability and the regime's fear of urban riots, the unions thought that they could push for more benefits. That is, although the public employees had compelled the regime to offer concessions, they thought they could elicit a better deal. Every union proposed its own package of concessions. The UMT put forth a generous plan, including a minimum wage increase of 1,390 dirhams and an income tax of 35 per cent. The UNTM, meanwhile, asked for an 890-dirham increase with a tax of 33 per cent. The CDT proposed a 700-dirham increase, a tax of 34 per cent, and a raise of retirement pensions by 50 per cent.<sup>362</sup> Facing these rival proposals, the Fassi administration expressed little enthusiasm; there was little reason to grant a package of concessions if the unions, themselves, could not harmonise their material demands.

To overcome these coordination problems, the unions convened on 15 April 2011 and prepared a concessions package that they would present to the regime, a 'portfolio of common demands'.<sup>363</sup> Morocco's five main unions—the UMT, FDT, UGTM, UNTM, and CDT—signed the portfolio of demands. On this list, a number of familiar demands appeared—the unions called for a boost in

---

<sup>362</sup> S. Ali, 'Morocco Launches Labor Talks', *Maghrabia.com*, 15/4/2011. [http://magharebia.com/en\\_GB/articles/awi/features/2011/04/15/feature-03](http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2011/04/15/feature-03) (accessed 27/7/2013).

<sup>363</sup> 'malif al-mutaalib al-mushtaarikah', *union archival document*, 1-15.

wages, 600 or 700 dirhams monthly which would be instated, retroactively, to January 2011.<sup>364</sup> Their portfolio of demands also included increases to retirement pensions, set at 600 dirhams monthly, to 1000. Finally, 33 per cent of public employees would be promoted, retroactive to January 2011, to compensate for backlogs.

In the final round of negotiations, held on 26 April 2011, the Fassi administration granted many concessions far more generous than its original proposal of reforms. Through coordinated action, Morocco's unions secured most of their material demands, which included retirement bonuses, professional promotions, and wage raises. The Fassi administration adopted the unions' plan for pensions; retired public employees would receive an unprecedented 70 per cent more monthly (i.e. from 600 dirhams per month to 1,000 dirhams). The Fassi team also conceded to the unions' plan for changes to the promotion system—33 per cent of employees would be promoted. Regarding wages, the salaries of private sector workers would get a 330-dirham boost implemented gradually, between July 2011 and July 2012. This would set the minimum wage at 2,437 per month (about \$300.00). The unions had secured a far larger salary increase, 330 dirhams, than the amount specified in the original Fassi plan, 211 dirhams. The biggest wage increase was for public employees, however. Those workers who had spearheaded labour protest against the regime beginning in early 2010 would receive 600-dirhams more monthly.

Although unionists were not the only citizens who called for changes to the royal business conglomerates, which began in the 2000s, concessions made after the Arab uprising responded to their demands. The palace agreed to relinquish 38 and 51 per cent of its shares in Morocco's largest dairy and biscuit producers, respectively.<sup>365</sup> It also sought a buyer for Morocco's biggest bank, though retained 48 per cent of its shares.<sup>366</sup> These concessions show that public employees—teachers, doctors, nurses, and government clerks—emerged as victors from Morocco's Arab

---

<sup>364</sup> Hajar al-Maghli, 'thlaath markaziyaat niqaabiyyah tarf'a saqif al-mutaalib', *as-Sabah* 3427 (19/4/2011): 5.

<sup>365</sup> 'King of Investments', 28/9/2013. <http://www.ventures-africa.com/2013/09/mohammed-vi-king-investments/> (accessed 24/7/2014).

<sup>366</sup> Ibtis Abouharia, 'Attijariwafa Bank: Financial Communication 2013,' *Attijariwafa Bank* (2013): 2.

uprising of 2011. Afraid that sustained labour participation in protests could arouse urban riots, as it had in previous decades, the regime acquiesced to calm syndicate anger.

## Conclusion

The preceding narrative has illustrated how labour unions utilised unrest stemming from Morocco's Arab uprising to articulate their interests, exert pressure on their regime, and secure their material demands. To this aim, unions of public employees leveraged their influence as operators of state institutions—schools, hospitals, municipalities, and ministries. Their strikes in such institutions not only disrupted the consistency of public service delivery but also raised the spectre of urban riots, a phenomenon that had grown from protests of public employees throughout Moroccan history. Building off regime fear of such riots, the unions obtained major benefits for their supporters and improved their material conditions.

Critics of the above interpretation of state-labour relations during Morocco's uprising may view the material concessions given to unionists not as a victory for the *labour unions*, but rather as one for the *regime*. That is, such sceptics may see it as a strategy of co-optation used to buy-off the unions and distract them from pursuing a broader political project, such as regime change or democratisation. Co-optation, as a method of regime control, was used in Morocco both historically and during the uprisings.<sup>367</sup> In the Moroccan context, co-optation often occurs when the monarchy distributes benefits or rights to a group or faction directly in exchange for commitments of political loyalty.<sup>368</sup> Feminists, for example, rallied around the monarch in 2004 after he supported progressive family laws. Amazigh activists, likewise, increased their support for the king after he

---

<sup>367</sup> On co-optation, see: Lise Storm, *Party Politics and the Prospects for Democracy in North Africa* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2014): 4-6.; Ahmed Benchemsi 'Morocco: Outfoxing the Opposition,' *Journal of Democracy* 23, 1(2012): 60.

<sup>368</sup> Marina Ottaway and Meredith Riley, 'Morocco: From Top-down Reform to Democratic transition?,' *Carnegie Papers* 71 (2006): 13.

founded an institute to promote their language and culture, after decades of marginalisation. Did the situation of unionists parallel that of feminist and Amazigh activists in which broader objectives of democratisation were surrendered for narrow factional interests?

The answer to this question is no. In contrast to Tunisia and Egypt where protestors, *a priori*, demanded regime change, this did not occur in Morocco where they emphasised regime reform. Rather than occupying public squares for days to oust autocrats, Moroccans' activities were episodic. Protestors convened once per month to demonstrate, then departed at the day's end. Unions, similarly, did not call for regime change but rather agitated for greater benefits, which had been denied in previous years. Unions began their strikes and protests with the aim of winning new benefits and, when they did secure concessions, they ceased their contestation. Past episodes of labour protest from the 1980s and 1990s had created opportunities for urban riots, and the unions exploited this historical legacy to realise their present-day material interests.

While much research related to the Arab uprisings examines larger questions of regime change or continuity, this analysis has taken a different tack. It has shown how Morocco's public employees secured a victory that brought about smaller, though important, changes—better wages, larger pensions, and more promotions. By understanding how social movements—such as organised labour—used the unrest to secure their material interests without driving regime collapse, scholars gain a more complete understanding of the importance of the Arab uprisings, especially for states where protests did not cause structural change.

## **Acknowledgments**

I thank Osama Abi-Mershed, Zahra Babar, Francesco Cavatorta, Nouri Gana, Mehran Kamrava, Ricardo René Larémont, Zekeria Ould Ahmed Salem, and Paul Silverstein for feedback on earlier drafts. Thank you also, Paola Rivetti and Rosita Di Peri, and the BJMES reviewers.

# An enduring 'touristic miracle' in Tunisia? Coping with old challenges after the revolution

ROSITA DI PERI<sup>369</sup>

*ABSTRACT By the end of the 1960s Tunisia had developed a very aggressive tourism policy designed to encourage foreign private investment in the sector. In fact tourism became one of the flagships of Tunisian development, strongly contributing to re-invent the international reputation of Tunisia as an open, 'democratic and liberal' country. Even if the political scenario has changed after the 'Jasmine revolution', continuity seems to prevail in the tourism sector. This paper focuses on this continuity, examining two specific dimensions: the persistence of Tunisia's tourist model and the continuity in the representation of Tunisian tourism as the pillar of an everlasting process of change.*

**Keywords:** Tunisia, Tourism, Arab uprisings, Development, Decision-making process

## Introduction

Since the 1970s, the tourist industry has been one of the flagships of Tunisian developmental efforts. Crucial to overall economic growth strategy, it also served the purpose of strengthening Tunisia's reputation as an open country, attuned to the values of modernity. However, despite the resilience of the narrative of *grandeur*<sup>370</sup> Ben Ali deployed to celebrate economic progress linked to

---

<sup>369</sup> Department of Culture, Politics and Society, University of Turin. Email: [rosita.diperi@unito.it](mailto:rosita.diperi@unito.it)

<sup>370</sup> Tsourapas advances the notion of 'primisme' to exemplify the narrative of *grandeur* Ben Ali deployed to picture Tunisia as the first country ('premier' in French) in the region to reach economic and developmental



tourism, the sector is in crisis.<sup>371</sup> Indeed, the decrease in tourism revenues after regime change and political turmoil between 2010 and 2014<sup>372</sup> has negative consequences on the national economy as a whole.<sup>373</sup> Since 2011, Tunisia has been going through significant change, but a closer examination of the tourist industry suggests that dynamics of continuity prevail over change despite the sector's need for reform. This article examines such continuity by considering two *thawabit* (constant, in Arabic). First, the article focuses on the persistence of Tunisia's tourist model, a successful combination of 'Sun, Sand and Sea.' This is particularly interesting considering the fact that, over the years, the resistance of this sector to change has gone hand in hand with the resilience of political power. Second, this article elaborates on the continuity in the representation of Tunisian tourism as the pivot of a continuing process of change, which has been ideally going on since late 1980s. Such change, the article contends, is however a rhetorical instrument as the tourist industry has largely remained untouched over the years, although shrinking economic benefits for investors and persisting territorial problems suggest that new strategies should be implemented. These two dimensions are intertwined and reinforce each other. The persistence of the same touristic model suggests that policy-makers are unable or unwilling to come up with new strategies, despite their rhetorical commitment to reform. As a consequence, such continuity strengthens the model, which also is increasingly isolated from changes because it upholds abroad the idea of a stable and safe Tunisia, able to cope with political crises and adapt to economic reforms<sup>374</sup> - another element of continuity with

---

goals. Gerasimos Tsourapas, 'The Other Side of a Neoliberal Miracle: Economic Reform and Political De-Liberalization in Ben Ali's Tunisia,' *Mediterranean Politics* 18, 1 (2013): 23-41.

<sup>371</sup> Isabelle Mandraud, 'On Tunisia's tourist coast, frustration lurks behind the tranquil vistas,' *The Guardian Weekly*, 24/6/2014 <http://goo.gl/eHpBLZ> (accessed 29/9/2014). See also the interview with Habib Bouslama, *The all-inclusive concept gave the 'coup de grâce' to the Tunisian Hotel sector*, *Tourmag*, 3/3/2014 (<http://goo.gl/A7H1iX>, accessed 21/07/2014).

<sup>372</sup> 'Menaces sur la reprise du tourisme en Tunisie,' *Maghreb Emergent*, 19/7/2014 (<http://goo.gl/G8AUXm>, accessed 31/08/2014).

<sup>373</sup> For a critical and exhaustive examination of the connection between political instability and tourism, see Christian Steiner, 'An overestimated relationship? Violent political unrest and tourism Foreign Direct Investments in the Middle East,' *International Journal of Tourism Research* 12, 6 (2010): 726-738.

<sup>374</sup> The World Bank considers tourism a key sector in Tunisia's development and has suggested over the years a number of reforms (coastal zone management plans, cultural heritage preservation). World Bank, *Country*

Ben Ali's era.

The article concludes by observing that although the crisis of the touristic sector has been hidden over the years because the narrative of success had to prevail, political instability has highlighted the contradictions within the sector, stimulating a more open debate on development, democracy and economic growth.

### *Methodology*

The case of Tunisian tourism is relevant to this special issue for three reasons. First is the deep penetration of interests in the tourist sector within the Tunisian ruling elite. Second, the Tunisian case shows how the construction of a fragmented system of governance, characterised by autonomous powerful institutions, created in different periods and with few institutional linkages, has allowed them, at least since the late 1980s, to act for the maximization of interests for the categories that they represented and not for the benefit of the sector as a whole. Third is the negative impact that the chaotic development of the sector has had not only on the territory, but in addressing authoritarianism and a particular model of development.

This article relies on fieldwork and semi-structured interviews carried out in Tunisia between 2013 and 2014. In total 32 in-depth interviews have been conducted, and some of them have been repeated. The research has been realised in two phases. First, in order to reconstruct the historical memory of the tourist sector (how it has developed over the years, to what mechanisms it has responded, which logics prevailed...), former operators, managers and ministries of tourism have been interviewed. During the second phase, the attention was focused on the post-revolutionary period with the goal of grasping the ongoing dynamics within the industry. Therefore former civil servants, tourist operators such as hotel managers, travel agents, trainers, and the managers of the current governing bodies of the sector have been interviewed. In addition, participant observation

was carried out during specific initiatives<sup>375</sup> to track down the evolving top-down relationship between national bodies and local actors.

### **Tourism and politics in Tunisia**

Tourism is considered a key sector in the world economy. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), in the last ten years, the turnover connected to international tourism has increased exponentially and reached, in 2012, \$1,075 billion (against \$1,042 billion in 2011 and \$575 billion in 2000). Similarly, the number of people travelling for tourism has constantly increased exceeding 1 billion in 2012, with 1,035 million tourists crossing borders against 995 million in 2011.<sup>376</sup> Tourism represents 5 per cent of global GNP and significantly contributes to the global labour market as almost 7 per cent of jobs worldwide are tourism-related.<sup>377</sup> However, such an increase in tourism-related activities creates problems in terms of territorial management, exploitation of natural resources and poor employment conditions for the local labour force. These critical reflections resonate in the case of developing countries in particular. Documents released by international organisations dealing with tourism, such as the UNWTO and the World Bank, show that tourism-related policies have become more and more normative and prescriptive, *de facto* one of the instruments advancing the neo-liberal economic order.<sup>378</sup>

Because of its economic relevance, tourism is a highly sensitive political issue too. Medium and long-term effects of tourism-related policies strongly impact local and national development, affecting the elites as well as ordinary citizens. Thus control over the sector, the policies elaborated for its development and the social and cultural dynamics it originates

---

<sup>375</sup> The days of the 'Café du Patrimoine,' Heritage Day celebrations in Kef and other initiatives in the Kef region.

<sup>376</sup> UNWTO, Tourism Highlights. 2013 Edition (<http://goo.gl/FQ0sYg>, accessed 24/03/2014).

<sup>377</sup> Estimated from available data. Though tourism is often referred to as the largest sector in the global economy, its exact size is impossible to determine as it has no clear delimitation.

<sup>378</sup> Donald Hawkins and Shaun Mann, 'The World Bank's Role in Tourism Development,' *Annals of Tourism Research* 34, 2 (2007): 348-363.

appeals to a number of state and non-state actors, which take part in complex negotiations related to the governance of tourism. However, despite its politically charged nature, tourism has appealed to scholars mainly for its economic and financial aspects. Consequently, the scholarship has traditionally neglected the political dimension of tourism and the role of the state in it.<sup>379</sup> Studies have linked tourism and development, focusing in particular on the role of multinational companies and Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) in sustaining growth and stimulating development. Only few scholars and experts have paid attention to the link between tourism and the social, political and economic conditions of the countries under consideration.<sup>380</sup> In other words, while much attention has been paid to tourism as an engine of development, more recent studies question the very notion of development, also touching upon the role tourism plays in it. The questions these studies ask relate to the meaning and the politics of development, its models and objectives, and the way tourism merges with political and economic elites' interests.<sup>381</sup> Following on from this, scholars have analysed a number of connections existing between tourism and political phenomena.

Consequently, different approaches emerged. Some scholars rely on the positivist view that tourism is a sort of 'magic formula' to bring about and promote virtuous processes of democratisation and development. Elaborating on modernisation theory, this view considers that tourism is not only a tool to promote development, but also an instrument to accelerate economic and political processes stimulating transitions to democracy.<sup>382</sup> Other scholars

---

<sup>379</sup> As also Waleed Hazbun pointed out: 'Globalisation, Reterritorialisation and the Political Economy of Tourism development in the Middle East,' *Geopolitics* 9, 2 (2004): 310-341.

<sup>380</sup> See: Raoul Bianchi, 'Towards a New Political Economy of Global Tourism', in Richard Sharpley and David Telfer (eds.), *Tourism and Development. Concepts and Issues* (Cleverdon: Channel View): 271; Colin Hall, *Tourism and Politics: Power, Policy and Place* (London: Chichester, 1994) and Thomas Richter and Christian Steiner, 'Politics, Economics and Tourism Development in Egypt: insights into the sectorial transformations of a neo-patrimonial rentier state,' *Third World Quarterly* 29, 5 (2008): 939-959.

<sup>381</sup> Frances Brown and Derek Hall, 'Tourism and Development in the Global South: the issues,' *Third World Quarterly* 29, 5 (2008): 839-849.

<sup>382</sup> Telfer, 'The Evolution of Tourism and Development Theory,' in Sharpley and Telfer (eds.), *Tourism and Development*, cit., 35-79.

expose the problematic nature of such claims by elaborating on Goldworthy's<sup>383</sup> critique of development theories and by highlighting that the theoretical link between tourism and development simply may not be consistent with the reality on the ground.<sup>384</sup> Scholars of the Middle East have contributed to the debate by examining the connection between authoritarian resilience and tourism, noting that the transformation of the sector after privatisation and neo-liberal reforms during the 1990s has strengthened authoritarianism, with the ruler's circles benefitting from economic reforms. In the case of Egypt, Richter and Steiner highlighted how revenues originating from tourism were not shared with the wider public but distributed among the members of closed 'networks of privilege.'<sup>385</sup> This finding also speaks to the scholarship examining the causes of the Arab Uprisings, as the outburst of popular discontent is strongly linked to the missing redistribution of wealth and the 'predatory' attitude of elites in the region.<sup>386</sup>

The development of the tourist sector in Tunisia has followed a similar trajectory. In particular, during the Ben Ali's era, the predatory attitude of the elites and the president's closest circles, exacerbated by liberalisation policies, was paradoxically accompanied by the strengthening of the regime domestically and internationally.<sup>387</sup> Indeed, pre-2011 Tunisian regime deployed a representation of Tunisia as a successful country gradually moving towards democratisation. Tourism, represented as a 'developmental miracle,' became one of the pivots of such a representation,<sup>388</sup> as demonstrated, for example, by the high incidence of Tunisia

---

<sup>383</sup> David Goldsworthy, 'Thinking politically about development,' *Development and Change* 19, 3 (1988): 505–30.

<sup>384</sup> Jennifer Briedenhann and Eugenia Wickens, 'Tourism routes as a tool for the economic development of rural areas. Vibrant hope or impossible dream?,' *Tourism Management* 25, 1 (2004): 71–79.

<sup>385</sup> Richter and Steiner, 'Politics, Economics and Tourism Development in Egypt,' cit.

<sup>386</sup> Gilbert Achcar, *The people want. A radical exploration of the Arab uprisings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Angela Joya, 'The Egyptian revolution: crisis of neoliberalism and the potential for democratic politics,' *Review of African Political Economy* 129 (2011): 367–386.

<sup>387</sup> Beatrice Hibou, 'Domination and control in Tunisia: economic levers for the exercise of authoritarian power,' *Review of African Political Economy* 108 (2006): 185–206.

<sup>388</sup> Hazbun, 'Images of Openness, Spaces of Control: The Politics of Tourism Development in Tunisia,' *The Arab Studies Journal* (2007/2008): 10–35. Karen Pfeifer, 'How Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan, and even Egypt Became IMF Success Stories in the 1990s,' *Middle East Report* 29, 1 (1999): 23–27.

tourism contribution on GDP from 1990 to 2013 compared to other larger countries in the Mediterranean Region such as Turkey and Egypt (Table 1). In addition, over time the sector has been the object of several legal initiatives (Table 2) that favoured FDIs and established new governance actors.<sup>389</sup>

### **TABLE 1 AND TABLE 2 HERE (pages 21 and following)**

The dark side of this interventionism is the huge environmental and social costs incurred, as international organisations repeatedly underlined.<sup>390</sup> This is exemplified in the uneven development of Tunisian regions, whereby the coastal areas in the North and East benefitted from the promotion of tourism to the detriment of Western areas – a trend that is still continuing, as emerges from Table 3 which summarises the investments in the regions of Tunisia between 2011 and 2012.

### **TABLE 3 HERE (pages 21 and following)**

Furthermore, the growth of the tourist sector led to an overestimation of its potential, resulting in the continuous construction of new accommodation facilities (see Table 4) and in a situation of market saturation.<sup>391</sup> In turn this has led to an increase in the number of hotel owners borrowing money to survive, thus generating a debt crisis in the sector.<sup>392</sup> Along with the

---

<sup>389</sup> Two laws, in particular, were crucial for the gradual process of liberalisation of the sector. The decree 66-339 (approved 2/2/1966) and the law 69-35 (6/6/1969) were aimed to encourage the building of new hotels and had a relevant role in attracting private investments.

<sup>390</sup> See, for example, World Bank, Country Assistance Strategy, 28/3/2000, cit. but also World Bank, Country Assistance Strategy Report, 13/8/2007 (<http://goo.gl/743x6R>, accessed 15/06/2014).

<sup>391</sup> Wafa Khelif, 'L'hôtellerie tunisienne: radioscopie d'un secteur en crise,' *L'Année du Maghreb* 1 (2006): 375-394.

<sup>392</sup> Frida Dahmani, 'Pourquoi le tourisme ne fait plus recette,' *Jeune Afrique*, 1/10/2010 (<http://goo.gl/zEMJjV>, accessed 30/9/2014) but also Khaled Boumiza, *Tourisme: Endetté et revendicatif*, WebManagerCenter, 21/09/2003 (<http://goo.gl/og0CSi>, accessed 31/08/2014).

absence of political will to reform the sector, this explains the lack of resources available to diversify Tunisia's tourist model.<sup>393</sup>

#### **TABLE 4 HERE (pages 21 and following)**

Data suggest that the tourist sector in Tunisia has historically been regarded as a pillar of development, with both the state and private actors investing in it. This led to the establishment of a well-equipped industry difficult to be transformed significantly and seemingly able to sustain the country even at turbulent times. Indeed, the overarching hypothesis of this article is that, despite broader changes in national politics with Ben Ali's fall, there is continuity in the model of tourism Tunisia presents. Such continuity is problematic today because of the relative crisis of the sector, caused by political turmoil and economic unsustainability.<sup>394</sup> The following section examines two *thawabit* in the tourist industry, contrasting the periods before and after the uprisings: the persistence of the touristic-developmental model and the persistence of tourism as the means to promote the image of a 'new' Tunisia both domestically and abroad. Despite contending that continuity has prevailed over change, the analysis also highlights that some change is taking place. Indeed, continuity is not a homogenous, granitic block and change has to be acknowledged even if it does not question the broader touristic model the Tunisian governments have been enforcing for decades, despite changes in the international tourism market.

#### ***Thawabit* in the persistence of the touristic model**

---

<sup>393</sup> This is evident in the classification of beds available per type of tourism. For example in 2010, according to ONTT, 210,508 beds were available for 'seaside' tourism while 15,172 for 'city' tourism. See: ONTT, *Le tourisme en chiffres* (Tunis : ONTT, 2011).

<sup>394</sup> Ridha Lahmar, 'La confusion tourisme-hôtellerie persiste!!', *Réalités*, 17/7/2013 (<http://goo.gl/2uUGkZ>, accessed 31/08/2014).

Tunisia pioneered the industry of tourism in the Arab world.<sup>395</sup> Since independence, the tourist industry was considered a priority and the Bourguiba regime established new institutions to strengthen and control the sector,<sup>396</sup> giving tourism a crucial role in national development plans.<sup>397</sup> Indeed, tourism not only generated revenues by bringing foreign currency into the country and stabilising macro-economic indicators,<sup>398</sup> but also realised Bourguiba's postcolonial vision of an 'open country,' more attuned to Western values than other post-colonial Arab republics. Tunisia's touristic model was built upon the so-called '3S' (Sea, Sun and Sand), whose typical representation is the *Tanit*, a seaside accommodation intended for European, middle class mass tourists.<sup>399</sup>

Between 1962 and 1972,<sup>400</sup> successive development plans prioritised the development of the sector. Despite indicating the state as responsible for its take-off,<sup>401</sup> the tourist sector could avoid collectivization and benefitted from private investments due to its strategic role in the economy.<sup>402</sup> The result was the development of an industry characterised by mass tourism and huge infrastructural investments available for building accommodations; a model that could be labelled 'Fordist.'<sup>403</sup> The growth of the sector was impressive. Between 1962 and 1971, the number of beds increased by 372.5 per cent and in 1970, the sector contributed to the GDP with 31.6 million Tunisian Dinar (TD) in foreign receipts, thus covering 48,7 per cent of the

---

<sup>395</sup> Interview with Lofti Belaif, tourist guide, Tunis, 26/04/2013.

<sup>396</sup> Ammar Aloui, 'Révolution et tourisme en Tunisie. Le secteur touristique en Tunisie avant et après le 'Printemps arabe', in Di Peri, Raffaella Giordana (eds.), *Revolution without revolutions? The challenges of tourism sector in Tunisia* (Bologna: I Libri di Emil, 2013): 103-168. Interview with Lotfi Rahmouni, Director of the Institut des Hautes Etudes touristiques de Sidi Dhrif, Sidi Dhrif, 26/04/2013; interview with Chantal Khadira, Manager of the Hotel Majestic, Tunis, 27/04/2013. Interview with Yihad Elloumi, economic consultant, Tunis, 19/03/2014.

<sup>397</sup> See: Secrétariat d'Etat au Plan et aux finances, *Perspectives décennales de développement 1962-1971* (Tunis : 1961).

<sup>398</sup> Jean Mohammed Chapoutot, 'Tourisme, Alternative à l'aménagement en Tunisie,' *Revue d'économie régionale et Urbaine* 4 (1990) : 511-522.

<sup>399</sup> Maxime Weigert, *Le tourisme en Tunisie. Les défis à l'heure de la transition démocratique*, Les Notes de l'Ipemed, 12 (2012): 8.

<sup>400</sup> The 3-year development plans here considered are: 1962-1964, 1965-1968 and 1969-1972.

<sup>401</sup> Aloui, *Le tourisme international en Tunisie: Développement, compétitivité, dans l'espace méditerranéen. Bilan et stratégie alternative* (Université Aix-Marseille III: Centre des Hautes études du Tourisme, 1986).

<sup>402</sup> Commission National Sectorielle du Tourisme et du Thermalisme (CNSTT), *L'Evolution du Tourisme en Tunisie, Retrospective (1961-1971)* (Tunis: CNSTT, 1972).

<sup>403</sup> Interview to a former manager in the tourism sector, Tunis, 21/04/2013.



national trade deficit.<sup>404</sup>

During this phase, few traders' families were leading the sector, such as the Fourati, Khéchine, Allani and Miled from their home region of Kairouan (located inland from the Sousse-Monastir tourism area).<sup>405</sup> These families often became involved in the industry by managing state-owned hotels, and later developed the first private hotel chains of Tunisia<sup>406</sup> thanks to the quasi-monopoly on the industry they enjoyed.<sup>407</sup> However, private ownership did not change the broader model Tunisian tourism was built upon. In fact, the type of tourism the country appealed to, as well as the infrastructures available, concurred in strengthening the existing 'Fordist' model.

Even the enforcement of aggressive privatisation plans, the so-called *infatih*, during the 1970s did not question this model. The influx of Gulf and European capitals resulted in the creation of business partnerships with non-Tunisian partners, which integrated the country into the regional economic environment, weakening state control.<sup>408</sup> This process resulted in Tunisian tourism becoming dependent on international tour-operators and investors, to the point that the latter began to buy stakes in hotels and created joint consortia, such as the CTKD (Consortium Tuniso-Koweïtien de Développement), or specific credit programs of the African Bank for Development.<sup>409</sup> The presence of private and international capital in the tourist industry however did not stimulate the restructuring of the sector, as it continued to expand by relying on the existing *modus operandi*.

---

<sup>404</sup> Robert Poirier, 'Tourism and Development in Tunisia,' *Annals of Tourism Research* 22, 1 (1995): 157-161.

<sup>405</sup> Mohamed Bergaoui, *Tourisme et voyages en Tunisie: Le temps des pionniers, 1956-1973* (Tunis: Mohamed Bergaoui, 2003). See also Abdelaziz Barrouhi, 'La grande famille du tourisme', *Jeune Afrique*, 30/03/2009 (<http://goo.gl/0KpLV3>, accessed 11/07/2014).

<sup>406</sup> Interview with Ahmed Smaoui, former Ministry of Tourism, Tunis 18/03/2014.

<sup>407</sup> Interview with Lotfi Rahmouni, 26/04/2013; Author's discussion with tourist guides during the meeting 'Journée des Associations du Patrimoine, du Tourisme & de l'Environnement', Dar Bach Hamba, Tunis, 27/04/2013.

<sup>408</sup> According to the Ministry of Planning, from 1962 to 1971, public investments in tourism fell from 88.9 per cent to 9 per cent while private investments grew from 11.1 per cent to 91 per cent. *Rétrospectives décennales 1962-1971*, Publication du Ministère du Plan (Tunis: 1972).

<sup>409</sup> Interview with Abdellatif Taboubi, tourism professional, Tunis, 28/04/2013.

The liberalisation of the tourist industry was encouraged by Ben Ali after his ascent to power in 1987.<sup>410</sup> It was presented as a means to insert Tunisia in the global market and to attract new foreign capitals and investments. After a period of crisis during the last years of Bourguiba's mandate, due to political instability and severe financial stabilisation plans, the tourist industry recovered during the first years of Ben Ali's rule. The expansion was due to the inclusion of Tunisia in the Structural Adjustment Plans and the full convertibility of the TD.<sup>411</sup> This positive development was also facilitated by the flourishing of private investments during the 1990s. Indeed, the 1992 investment code allowed new entrepreneurial actors, the so-called *promoteurs*, to emerge and later, between 1994 and 1996, a newer investment code promoted the *jeunes promoteurs* and further facilitated investment procedures.<sup>412</sup> This growth helped Ben Ali to promote Tunisia as a regional tourist destination. As one interviewee put it, 'during the 1990s, it seemed that tourism was the only preoccupation of the Prime Minister and his entourage.'<sup>413</sup> Another interviewee highlighted that, between 1986 and 1992, state investment plans and the 1992 code facilitated the influx of private capitals by nearly 300 million of dollars.<sup>414</sup> In the period corresponding to the Tenth Economic and Social Development Plan (2000-2006) the growth of investments in the tourist industry was around 5 per cent, amounting to, according to the ONTT, 1.9 billion of euros (Table 5).

### **TABLE 5 HERE (pages 21 and following)**

---

<sup>410</sup> See the VII (1987-1991) and VIII (1992-1996) plans of development. Ministère du Plan, *Le VIIème Plan et Ministère du Tourisme et de l'Artisanat, VIIIème Plan*.

<sup>411</sup> See Robert King, 'The political logic of economic reform in Tunisia,' in Azzedine Layachi (ed.), *Economic crisis and political change in the North Africa* (Westport: Praeger, 1998): 107-128.

<sup>412</sup> Interview with Gueddiche Romdhane, tourism consultant, Tunis, 24/04/2013 and 18/03/2014.

<sup>413</sup> Interview with Gueddiche Romdhane, 24/04/2013.

<sup>414</sup> Interview with Ahmed Smaoui, former Ministry of Tourism, Tunis 18/03/2014.

The seemingly never-ending growth of investments available for the construction of new facilities<sup>415</sup> (Table 4), the huge profits for domestic and international investors and the increase in jobs generated by the sector led to the crystallization of the Tunisian touristic and developmental model. Although during Ben Ali's mandates attempts were made to diversify the industry by investing in integrated tourist complexes such as Port el Kantaoui, or in areas with a weaker tourist vocation, as the Sahara region, the touristic model has remained largely unchanged. The model however presented a number of weaknesses such as its dependence on European tourism and investments, which have both suffered from the economic crisis in recent years. In addition, recent political instability in North Africa also discouraged tourists to visit Tunisia.<sup>416</sup> Finally, the presence of private interests - Ben Ali's family and closest circles' interests - prevented the sector from changing. An evidence of this is the absence of an open sky agreement. While it would have encouraged investments by low cost airlines, as in Morocco and Turkey, it could have damaged the monopoly of TunisAir, known to be part of the business assets of Ben Ali's family.<sup>417</sup>

After Ben Ali's fall, the model has not undergone significant changes. Investments remain unbalanced to the benefit of coastal areas.<sup>418</sup> The ongoing increase in the number of beds and facilities suggests that the new government still relies on a model characterised by perennial hotel construction, with no consideration for market saturation. Pre-uprisings development plans are still running and, for instance, the XI development plan (2007-2011) foresees investments in facilities for 2.3 billion of TD (1.35 billion of Euros). Its final goal is to build

---

<sup>415</sup> As reported by Abdellatif Taboubi, in the coastal area between Nabeul to Mahdia more than two thirds out of the facilities in the country were built in early 2000s (Interview, tourism professional, Tunis, 28/04/2013).

<sup>416</sup> One interviewee reports that many recently-built facilities were left almost empty. This is the case of Port el Kantaoui (14,000 beds available). Interview with Yiad Elloumi, tourism economic consultant, Tunis, 19/03/2014.

<sup>417</sup> 'Tunisie: La Véritable Nature Du Régime De Ben Ali,' *Nawaat*, 13/1/2011 (<http://goo.gl/N4qK2G>, accessed 30/9/2014) and also Weigart, *Le tourisme en Tunisie*, cit.

<sup>418</sup> Author's interviews realised with different tourism professionals at the 19 Salon du Tourisme Tunisien (MIT), el Kram, 24-27/4/2013.

some 25,000 new beds, reaching by the end of 2011 a total of 258,000 beds available.<sup>419</sup> Moreover, the ministers of tourism in charge since 2011 (5 until today), although aware of the difficulties of the sector,<sup>420</sup> seem to act on the basis of short-term priorities, with the goal of 'saving the summer tourist season.'<sup>421</sup> The initiatives they promoted so far are based on old recipes. For example, the campaign 'I Love Tunisia,' launched in the aftermath of the uprisings to save the tourist season of 2011 and developed by a French advertisement company, has been criticised because it proposed again a 'mass tourism recipe,' based on a model of development considered obsolete.<sup>422</sup> The Ministry of Tourism's plan titled 'La stratégie du tourisme tunisien à l'horizon 2016' does not only lack an overall and comprehensive strategy,<sup>423</sup> but was issued in 2009, before the revolution. The government has not updated this document yet, and it constitutes the only institutional strategy elaborated in the realm of tourism. As pointed out by the former director of the ONTT Habib Ammar, this plan has at least two weaknesses: it pays no attention to the territory and lacks a strategy that looks at Tunisian tourism as part of the broader regional context.<sup>424</sup> Political parties also seem to lack long-term perspective. For example, Al-Nahda considers tourism an important factor for the national economy but does not propose any strategy to improve or change the current model. It broadly points to the necessity to elaborate a shared tourism national policy in order to

---

<sup>419</sup> 'Tourisme intégré, mode d'emploi,' *Jeune Afrique*, 30/09/2007 (<http://goo.gl/h0HW3x>, accessed 13/08/2014).

<sup>420</sup> See, for example, the declaration of ex-Minister Elyes Fakhfakh who repeatedly stressed the need to revive Tunisian tourism, whose weaknesses date back to the period before the revolution. Oualid Dachraoui, 'Interview de Mr Elyès Fakhfakh, nouveau ministre tunisien du tourisme,' *00216Mag*, 29/12/20011(<http://goo.gl/MmFidv> accessed 11/07/2014).

<sup>421</sup> See: Amel Karboul first speech as Minister of Tourism, Youtube, 30/1/2014 (<http://goo.gl/YW3QFmti>, accessed 3/8/2014).

<sup>422</sup> Ali Gargouri, 'Où sont passés les fonds investis pour promouvoir le tourisme tunisien?', *Nawaat*, 8/10/2011 (<http://goo.gl/dNmDoy>, accessed 12/07/2014).

<sup>423</sup> The plan establishes the following principles: diversification of tourism; creation of a new communication system useful to advertise tourism; a marketing plan; financing the sector through an ad hoc investment plan. The aim is make of Tunisia one of the main tourist destinations in the world. See also the document on the strategic vision of Tunisian tourism at <http://goo.gl/J6Hjmz> (accessed 10/07/2014).

<sup>424</sup> 'Interview to Habib Ammar,' *WebManagerCenter*, 14/4/2011 (<http://goo.gl/lnQfTH>, accessed 11/07/2014).

overcome the crisis.<sup>425</sup> It must be emphasised, however, that Minister Amel Karboul, appointed in January 2014, is attempting to stimulate the public discourse on tourism, debating the extant model and presenting tourism as 'everyone's business.'<sup>426</sup> Despite this, many believe that she will not deliver what she promised.<sup>427</sup>

Beyond the rhetoric of 'new-ism,' the first issue to remain unsolved is the diversification of touristic products Tunisia could offer. Despite the construction of the new integrated touristic complexes of Port el Kantaoui and Yasmine Hammamet,<sup>428</sup> which partially conveyed a novel image of the country, the most common touristic formula for Tunisia remains the all-inclusive package, with international tour operators promoting it almost uniquely.<sup>429</sup> In addition, except for the promotion of Saharan tourism, the bulk of investments focused on the coast.<sup>430</sup> This not only has had negative consequences on the environment, which had already been heavily exploited, but also created a gap between the official discourse and what happened on the ground.<sup>431</sup>

### **Second *thawabit*: tourism as a part of the narrative of the 'new Tunisia'**

The second constant is the continuity in the representation of tourism as a successful economic sector, pivotal to the narrative of the 'new Tunisia'. In this regard, the year 1987 is a key date for both Tunisian politics and tourism. Indeed, under Ben Ali's rule, tourism became the showcase of the new, post-1987 Tunisia. He pledged to create a new era based on political pluralism,

---

<sup>425</sup> Interview with Mohammed Khouja, Tunis, 17/04/2014. For Al-Nahda's electoral programme see <http://goo.gl/NvL6J6> (accessed 21/05/2014).

<sup>426</sup> See Kamel Bouaouina, 'Le tourisme, c'est l'affaire de tous !,' *Le Temps*, 12/6/2014 (<http://goo.gl/mG8ddF> accessed 30/9/2014); 'Consultation nationale sur le Tourisme,' WebManagerCenter, 05/04/2004, <http://goo.gl/GB70if>, accessed 12/07/2014).

<sup>427</sup> Bouaouina, 'Notre ministère semble avoir...,' *Le Temps*, 12/6/2014 (<http://goo.gl/T1FwZo>, accessed 20/07/2014).

<sup>428</sup> Interview with Yihad Elloumi, economic consultant, Tunis, 19/03/2014. On Hammamet see: Mohamed Hellal, 'La marina de la station touristique intégrée Yasmine-Hammamet (Tunisie). Enjeux, conception et impacts,' *L'Information géographique* 4, 73 (2009): 6-23.

<sup>429</sup> Interview with Ahmed Trabelsi, President de l'Association Patrimoine & Environnement, Tunis, 14/03/2014.

<sup>430</sup> Interview with Yihad Elloumi, tourism economic consultant, Tunis, 19/03/2014.

<sup>431</sup> Abelala Bounouh, 'Nouvelles approches en matière de protection et de gestion du littoral en Tunisie,' *Méditerranée* 115 (2010): 45-53.

ending of corruption and economic growth through integration into the global economy. Tourism was a crucial element of his strategy and power consolidation. It is no coincidence that during the first council of ministers, which took place 5 days after the coup, the necessity of launching a new strategy for tourism, was discussed.<sup>432</sup> Furthermore, in 1988 Ben Ali created the Ministry of tourism choosing personally the first minister, Mohamed Jegham, Ben Ali's friend and expert in the development of big touristic complexes.<sup>433</sup> Since then, positions in the institutions governing the sector, whose number increased leading to growing bureaucratisation, were highly contested because of the power coming with them.<sup>434</sup> As an interviewee said, 'Tunisians knew that accessing the tourism bureaucracy under Ben Ali was a way to control the main levers of the economy.'<sup>435</sup>

Ben Ali's attempt at making tourism crucial to his narrative of a new Tunisia was helped by the fact that the sector emerged from a phase of crisis<sup>436</sup> in timely coincidence with the beginning of his mandate. When Ben Ali ascended to power, a number of contingent factors allowed the sector to grow again. In 1988, a significant recovery took place with the number of tourists' arrivals increasing to 3,468,360, compared to 1,874,734 in 1987. Investments in the sector also increased. However, as Hazbun points out, this growth was not determined by Ben Ali's ability rather by external factors such as the economic recovery in Northern Europe that made Tunisian prices competitive, especially after the 1986 TD devaluation.<sup>437</sup> In addition, the

---

<sup>432</sup> ONTT, *Le VIIème Plan* cit., 14.

<sup>433</sup> Interview with Gueddiche Romdhane, tourism's consultant, Tunis, 24/04/2013.

<sup>434</sup> See, for example, the case of Tijani Haddad, Minister of Tourism in 2004, nicknamed 'Mister Tourism' for the numerous positions (and power) he obtained over the years. See: Abdelaziz Barrouhi, 'Monsieur Tourisme,' *Jeune Afrique*, 12/12/2005 (<http://goo.gl/OhvqNI>, accessed 31/08/2014).

<sup>435</sup> Interview, Tunis, 19/04/2013, anonymous source.

<sup>436</sup> The crisis was caused by financial and political issues: the gradual worsening of the national balance of payments; decrease in the total amount of investment in tourism (from 64,210 TD 1981 to 3,954 in 1986); the displacement of the PLO in Tunis, followed by the 1985 Israeli bombing; and the escalation of violence between the government and Islamist forces, which led to bombings in Sousse and Monastir few months before the 1987 coup. These factors concur to explain the pre-1987 crisis of the industry. According to the ONTT tourists arrivals dropped from 2,002,997 in 1985 to 1,502,092 in 1986 (-24.9 per cent). See Jean-Marie Miossec, *Le tourisme en Tunisie un pays en développement dans l'espace touristique international* (Thèse de doctorat, Université de Tours 1, 1996): 560.

<sup>437</sup> Hazbun, *Images of Openness, Spaces of Control*, cit., 14-15.

confidence of the market and international organisations<sup>438</sup> in the ability of Tunisia to overcome the crisis helped Ben Ali in consolidating his image and reputation as the initiator of a successful, new era for Tunisia. In particular, the 1988 successful summer season helped him to consolidate tourism as a tool of control over the territory and the population, while presenting Tunisia as an open and modern country abroad.<sup>439</sup> One of the key strategies deployed by Ben Ali was diversification, which was substantiated in the construction of new resorts, the permission to film industry to use locations on the territory and the attempt to expand Saharan tourism. Such projects were mediatised thanks to spectacular inauguration's ceremonies and the creation of new brands and new product for tourists.<sup>440</sup> In the short-term this strategy was successful, as investments in the sector increased (Table 5) along with tourist's arrivals which, according to the ONTT, doubled between 1988 (3,468,360) and 2010 (6,902,749). However, this success story did not solve those issues that have gradually led to the saturation of the Tunisian tourist market and its crisis.

The second unresolved issue is linked to the belief that tourism would have been a driving force for the Tunisian economy as a whole. This did not happen. However, Ben Ali successfully reiterated this belief by, for instance, presenting the growth of jobs in the tourist sector as an example of the good performance of the labour market *tout court*.<sup>441</sup> As a consequence, the seemingly never-ending growth of tourism allowed the regime to shift the attention from the bad performance of other macro-economic indicators, hiding the economic difficulties Tunisia

---

<sup>438</sup> The signature of a Stand-by Agreement which enacted a series of structural adjustment and stabilisation programs under the guidance of the IMF and WB, played an important role in this. See: Mohamed Bechri and Sonia Naccache, 'The Political Economy of Development Policy in Tunisia,' in Jeffrey Nugent and Hashem Pesaran (eds.), *Explaining Growth in the Middle East. Contributions to Economic Analysis*, Vol. 278 (Bradford: Emerald): 308-334.

<sup>439</sup> Hazbun 'Globalisation, Reterritorialisation and the Political Economy of Tourism', cit.

<sup>440</sup> See, for example: 'Tijani Haddad, ministre du Tourisme: "Nous avons plusieurs cordes à notre arc!"', *Jeune Afrique*, 10/07/2005 (<http://goo.gl/M4hT74>, accessed 14/08/2014).

<sup>441</sup> According to the World Bank in 2005 the unemployment rate among young people (15-24 years) was about the 15 per cent and reaches the 30per cent in 2009. World Bank Reports 2006-2010 (<http://goo.gl/CSWx3f>).

was facing. Despite evidence of the crisis, such as the heavy indebtedness of hotel owners,<sup>442</sup> the prevailing touristic model remained largely untouched.

In early 2000s, despite the crisis of tourism as evidenced by the decline of the sector's contribution to the national GDP (Table 1), Ben Ali successfully presented the crisis as a short-term phenomenon. He did this by downplaying the lack of a national development strategy for tourism and by blaming external events, namely the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2000, 9/11, the 2003 war in Iraq, and the bombings in Djerba and Casablanca in 2002 and 2003. Although these events did actually contribute to the decline in the tourists' arrivals in the region,<sup>443</sup> it should be emphasised that the roots of the relative crisis of Tunisian tourism were also linked to a lack of long-term strategy. As pointed out by an interviewee, a former executive of the ONTT, during the 2000s, the doubling of hotel capacity was not accompanied by broader measures, such as effective promotion and training. According to him, the political will to address the weaknesses of the sector was absent, and even some World Bank studies urging the government to diversify the industry, have never been made public.<sup>444</sup>

After the fall of Ben Ali, the crisis seems to have burst out in the open and it is discussed in articles published in the national and international press.<sup>445</sup> However, although the issue entered the public debate, continuity seems to prevail. The new government in power indeed has not proceeded to diversifying the type of touristic products Tunisia offers, and the same narrative about tourism and 'new-ism' is still present. In post-Ben Ali Tunisia, indeed, tourism is an instrument to promote the political transition, which ideally should navigate the country into a new era of prosperity and democracy. This narrative is also strengthened by the relative success

---

<sup>442</sup> On this, see the dossier of the magazine *l'Expression*, 'Gros nuages sur le tourisme tunisien', 39, July 2008 and Khaled Boumiza, 'Tourisme: Endetté et revendicatif,' cit.

<sup>443</sup> See, for example, 'Journée du tourisme: Conforter la place de la Tunisie sur les marchés mondiaux,' *WebManagerCenter*, 01/01/2004 (<http://goo.gl/sBT4BS>, accessed 3/08/2014).

<sup>444</sup> Interview, Tunis, 20/02/2014, anonymous source.

<sup>445</sup> Bouaouina, 'L'ONTT frappe fort: 8 hôtels déclassés et 19 agences de voyages fermées,' *Le Temps*, 9/7/2014 (<http://goo.gl/rUY7R1>, accessed 2/08/2014).



of Tunisia's tourist industry if compared to the other countries that went through turmoil, such as Egypt – a difference that Tunisian authorities emphasise.<sup>446</sup>

The narrative of a new Tunisia is substantiated in the attempt to represent tourism as a 'clean sector,' free from those dynamics of patronage prevalent in the pre-2011 period.<sup>447</sup> A strategy to make this come true is replacing officers in key-positions. Examples of this are the nomination of Amel Karbel as Minister of Tourism, the first woman to hold this post, and Mohammed Ali Toumi as the new Director of FTAV, the *Fédération Tunisienne des Agences de Voyage et de Tourisme*. Toumi emphasised the use of new technologies, the deployment of new marketing strategies and innovative training methods to enhance the performance of the sector, thus engendering a feeling of novelty. In his words, 'the federation has experienced a real "revolution" with the goal to make it more competitive on the market and more responsive to the needs of the sector.'<sup>448</sup> Another attempt to foster this new-ist narrative is constituted by efforts of diversification. They have indeed been presented by authorities and, additionally, take place in the framework of the decentralisation policy, a novelty included in the new constitution itself. Nevertheless, they have many similarities with the efforts for tourism diversification undertaken during Ben Ali's era,<sup>449</sup> as for instance is the case of Saharan<sup>450</sup> and rural tourism.<sup>451</sup>

In order to sustain the 'new-ist' rhetoric of a new Tunisia and tourist industry, post-2011 authorities have had the tendency to present the difficulties of the sector as a short-term phenomenon instead of a structural problem, as it happened in pre-2011 Tunisia, thus absolving themselves from accusations of mismanagement. For instance, the responsibility for the relative crisis the sector is going through is blamed on the Islamists. They are charged with considering tourism a form of 'prostitution,' as Marzouki declared.<sup>452</sup> This accusation was also

---

<sup>446</sup> See, 'Tourisme: La Tunisie se redresse plus vite que l'Egypte,' *Milles et une Tunisie*, 03/12/2012 (<http://goo.gl/mnzF7c>, accessed 31/08/2014).

<sup>447</sup> 'OT de Tunisie: notre modèle touristique n'est pas le fruit d'un régime politique,' *l'Echo Touristique*, 19/01/2011 (<http://goo.gl/5boV3M>, accessed 31/08/2014).

<sup>448</sup> Interview with Mohamed Ali Toumi, Tunis, 29/04/2013.

<sup>449</sup> Sami Yassine Turki, 'Evolution of Cities and Territories in Tunisia through Parties' Electoral Programmes and Civil Society's Proposal,' *Built Environment* 40, 1 (2014): 85-100.

<sup>450</sup> On the new Saharian Plan of Development see: 'Tunisie: annonce d'un plan de relance du tourisme saharien,' *Maghreb Emergent*, 21/02/2014 (<http://goo.gl/DQtUnh>, accessed 30/9/2014) and Hamza Marzouk, 'Le tourisme saharien, maillon faible du tourisme tunisien,' *L'Economiste Maghrebin*, 20/12/2013 (<http://goo.gl/Q5qcDA>, accessed 31/08/2014).

<sup>451</sup> On rural tourism, see: 'La ministre du Tourisme bientôt en visite au Kef et à Jendouba,' *Réalités*, 19/03/2014 (<http://goo.gl/0vnNh8/>, accessed 30/9/2014). See also Selima Karoui, 'Réaménagement du secteur de l'art dans les régions intérieures par l'investissement de la société civile,' *Nawaat*, 9/1/2014 (<http://goo.gl/r864q8>, accessed 31/08/2014).

<sup>452</sup> Marzouki Declaration, 12/7/2012. See: <http://goo.gl/OVR5Dp> (accessed 31/08/2014).

helped by violent confrontations between Salafists and the Tunisian army<sup>453</sup> and by campaigns discouraging tourists to visit areas considered to be in the hands of Salafists.<sup>454</sup> In a similar vein, the 2013 visit of the Egyptian preacher Mohamed Hassen to the touristic district of Hamammet was considered by professionals of the sector as damaging the image of Tunisia as a safe touristic destination.<sup>455</sup>

Despite the 'thawabit' in presenting tourism as a part of the narrative of a 'new Tunisia,' some elements of rupture exist. For example, a relevant effect of the revolution is that government's performances are questioned publicly. In an article published in the online journal 'Le tourisme Magazine' in 2013, it is stated that data and figures provided the ONTT about tourism-related policies have been manipulated in order to show that the government's diversification strategy is successful.<sup>456</sup> On the contrary, according to the article, investments in less touristy areas are not paying off considering that, for example, the region of Gafsa-Tozeur lost 70 per cent of its tourists (310,919 versus 998,287 in 2010) and the Tabarka-Ain Draham region registered a decline of 40 per cent in tourists' arrivals. Another example is the growing citizens' request to participate in the decision-making of public policies that impact on the population and the territory, a request that is openly debated. The opening up of decision-making processes could generate, in the medium or long period, virtuous effects that could not only stop the crisis when it comes to tourism, but also accelerate Tunisia's political transition. In addition, citizens increasingly use their visibility to promote sustainable tourism. This is the case for the Association for the safeguard of the Medina of Kef, an area that has not traditionally benefitted from tourism, which promotes sustainable tourism with the goals of re-appropriating the cultural heritage of the region and stimulating local development. However, the activities of the association lack a comprehensive and integrated strategy aimed

---

<sup>453</sup> 'Tunisian police arrest 10 Islamists following violent clashes in Kef,' *Albawaba News*, 1/12/2013 (<http://goo.gl/SV5BTj>, accessed 20/08/2014).

<sup>454</sup> Monia Ghamni, 'Salafist resurgence jeopardises Tunisian tourism,' *Magharebia*, 26/04/2013 (<http://goo.gl/f4ldcU>, accessed 31/08/2014).

<sup>455</sup> See, for example, Wafa Latik, 'Tunisie: L'arrivée du prédicateur égyptien Mohamed Hassan menace-t-elle le tourisme à Hammamet ?,' *LeMag*, 2/5/2013 (<http://goo.gl/Sr1vCF>, accessed 15/08/2014).

<sup>456</sup> See : 'Le vrai bilan du tourisme tunisien,' *Le tourisme Magazine*, 02/11/2013 (<http://goo.gl/5BjQi7>, accessed 31/08/2014).

to reach out to public institutions.<sup>457</sup> This problem relates to the troubled relationship between the national authorities and local communities, a legacy of state centralisation during the authoritarian period. Another attempt at influencing the decision-making process at the micro-level is the 'Cafè du Patrimoine,' where professionals discuss the creation of new training programs for tourist guides, working conditions as well as challenges to the protection of the national cultural heritage.<sup>458</sup> Discussions about the preservation of the cultural heritage seem to be promising as they turned out to be the beginning of broader reflections about models of sustainable tourism, strictly connected to social and economic development.<sup>459</sup> Notwithstanding these promising initiatives, the reform of the tourist sector is still one of the biggest challenges of the new Tunisia.<sup>460</sup>

## Conclusion

Tourism is a crucial sector in the Tunisian economy and it has a considerable role in determining economic and political choices. While it is true that, over the years, tourism has been a significant income generator, it is also necessary to consider that such revenues were generated by an aggressive exploitation of the 'Tunisian model' and consequently of the territory, regardless of the consequences of this exploitation. Despite the tentative promotion of new forms of tourism, continuity has prevailed over the years in the maintenance of a deficient touristic model and in the role assigned to tourism as the pivot of an ongoing, more rhetorical than actual, process of change. Thus, the *thawabit* of Tunisian tourism seem to be very resistant even if, after the revolution, they have become more porous than in the past

---

<sup>457</sup> Author's participation to the seminar for the preservation of the cultural heritage and author's focus group with the members of the Association pour le sauvegarde de la Medina du Kef, Le Kef, 15/03/2014.

<sup>458</sup> Author's participation in the first meeting of 'Cafè du patrimoine', Dar Bach Hamba, Tunis, 27/04/2013. Report of the conference 'Le droit au patrimoine' held by Mr. Zoubeir Mouhli, Directeur de l'ASM Tunis, 27/07/2013.

<sup>459</sup> Interview with Ahmed Trabelsi, 14/03/2014.

<sup>460</sup> Ridha Lahmar, 'La réforme du tourisme toujours en panne!', *Réalités*, 23/6/2014 (<http://goo.gl/L3d1yw>, accessed 31/08/2014).

thanks to a genuine debate about the future of the sector. Nevertheless, before and after the revolution likewise, the tourist sector seems to be led by logic of exploitation and securitisation. Only the claim for a more open and democratic decision-making process might provide a chance to reverse this problematic trend.

### **Acknowledgements**

My gratitude goes to Paola Rivetti for her invaluable input in drafting the second version of this article. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers who provided insightful comments. As co-editor of this Special Issue, I also thank the BJMES editorial board, all the anonymous referees and the contributors for their cooperation and professionalism. All mistakes are of my responsibility.

**Table 1**                      **Travel and tourism total contribution to GDP 1990-2013 (%)**

	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013
<b>Algeria</b>	4.5	4.5	6.2	8.2	8.4	8.1	8.2	8

<b>Egypt</b>	9.6	11.5	14	19	17.5	14.5	14.8	12.6
<b>Israel</b>	8.4	8.7	9.8	7.8	7.5	7.4	7.5	7.3
<b>Jordan</b>	25.3	22.9	20.7	21.8	23.7	20.3	21.4	20.3
<b>Lebanon</b>	5.9	4	1.1	29	27.9	22.5	19.9	19.2
<b>Libya</b>	3.3	3.7	5.2	7.2	4.4	5.5	6.7	6.2
<b>Morocco</b>	9.1	10	12.1	18.5	19.3	19.2	19.2	18.7
<b>Syria</b>	7.5	15.5	13.9	14.4	19.6	18.2	12.9	10.6
<b>Tunisia</b>	12.8	16.1	19.7	19.4	17.5	14.7	15.6	15.1
<b>Turkey</b>	6.8	8.2	10.6	12.2	10.2	11.6	11.9	12,3

*Source: Our elaboration on World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC)*

**Table 2 Juridification of touristic sector in Tunisia 1956-2012**

<b>Type</b>	<b>Bourguiba (1956-1987)</b>	<b>Ben Ali (1987-2011)</b>	<b>Post Ben Ali until 2012</b>
Laws	18	46	01

Law decrees	05	00	00
Governmental Decrees	36	98	09
Local decrees (ordinances)	23	79	06
Notifications	00	03	00
Total	84	226	16

Source : Our elaboration on CNUDST ([www.cnudst.rnrt.tn/](http://www.cnudst.rnrt.tn/)) and Journal Officiel de la République Tunisienne (JORT) ([www.iort.gov.tn/](http://www.iort.gov.tn/)).

**Table 3 Investments per Regions in Tunisia 2011/2012**

Period	8 months 2011		8 months 2012		Evol. %
	Amount	%	Amount	%	Total Evol.
East	1444,3 MDT	67,6	2107,4 MDT	79,8	45,9
West	692,5 MDT	32,4	534,3 MDT	20,2	-22,8
Total	2136,8 MDT	100	2641,7 MDT	100	23,6

Source : Our elaboration on Agence de Promotion de l'Industrie et de l'Innovation (Tunis)

**Table 4 Evolution of the accommodation capacity (1965-2011)**

Years	Number of structures	Bed capacity	Average bed capacity for structure
-------	----------------------	--------------	------------------------------------

	Number	AAGR%	Number	AAGR%	Number	AAGR%
<b>1965</b>	85	-	8726	-	102.6	-
<b>1971</b>	226	165.9	41252	372.5	182.5	78.0
<b>1981</b>	336	48.7	75847	83.9	225.7	23.7
<b>1991</b>	532	58.3	123188	62.4	231.6	2.6
<b>2001</b>	755	41.9	205605	66.9	272.3	17.6
<b>2008</b>	837	10.9	238495	16.0	285.0	4.6
<b>2009</b>	856	02.3	239890	0.05	280.2	-0.01
<b>2010</b>	856	0.0	241528	0.06	282.1	0.06
<b>2011</b>	861	0,58	242146	0,25	281,2	-0,31

Source : ONTT- Office National du Tourism Tunisien. If not otherwise specified, all ONTT data are taken from *Le tourisme Tunisien en chiffres* (Tunis: ONTT), a report the ONTT releases every year.

AAGR: Annual average rate of growth

**Table 5 Investments in tourist industry (millions of Tunisian Dinars)**

	<b>Tourist investments</b>	<b>Tunisian investments</b>	<b>FDIs</b>
--	--------------------------------	---------------------------------	-------------

<b>1994</b>	397.8	380.8	17
<b>1995</b>	449.1	421	28.1
<b>1996</b>	416.95	368.55	48.4
<b>1997</b>	353.3	330.3	23
<b>1998</b>	307	282.4	24.6
<b>1999</b>	324.68	287.48	37.2
<b>2000</b>	322.45	280.95	41.5
<b>2001</b>	330.86	229.76	101.1
<b>2002</b>	353.3	333.3	20
<b>2003</b>	282.3	263.8	18.5
<b>2004</b>	288.18	267.18	21
<b>2005</b>	246.21	229.44	16.8
<b>2006</b>	204.55	186.55	18
<b>2007</b>	213.18	141.18	72
<b>2008</b>	253.61	55.01	198.6
<b>2009</b>	309.27	223.77	85.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5052.74</b>	<b>4281.47</b>	<b>771.27</b>

*Source: ONTT, Le tourisme en chiffres, 2010*



# **Shifting Priorities or Business as Usual? Continuity and Change in the post-2011 IMF and World Bank Engagement with Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt**

ADAM HANIEH<sup>461</sup>

*ABSTRACT Following the popular uprisings that erupted across North Africa in 2010 and 2011, international financial institutions have embarked on a significant re-engagement with governments in Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt. New lending arrangements and project initiatives by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, in particular, have emphasised a supposed turn towards pro-poor policies, social inclusion and public engagement with economic decision-making. This article analyses the content and logic of IMF and World Bank lending to these three countries, examining whether this re-engagement represents a substantive shift away from the neoliberal policies that characterised pre-2011 IFI relationships with the region.*

Not long after the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak in February 2011, US President Barack Obama and other US government spokespeople expressed their approval of the ‘spirit of peaceful protest and perseverance’ and declared that the United States would ‘continue to be a friend and partner... ready to provide whatever assistance is necessary... to pursue a credible transition to a

---

<sup>461</sup> Department of Development Studies, SOAS, University of London. Email: ah92@soas.ac.uk

democracy.<sup>462</sup> Echoed widely by other Western leaders, these sentiments were soon followed by the promise of financial aid from a range of international institutions and governments gathered under the umbrella of the Deauville Partnership, an initiative launched at the May 2011 G8 Summit in France. The Partnership pledged up to US\$40 billion in loans and other assistance towards what they termed the ‘Arab Countries in Transition.’<sup>463</sup> Four key priority areas were identified as the focus of these funds: stabilisation, job creation, participation/governance, and political/economic integration.

Activists from across the region, particularly in Tunisia and Egypt, harshly criticised the negotiations that began between new governments and IFIs in the wake of the G8 summit. IFI loans and its associated debt were, in the words of one Tunisian activist, ‘not a secondary question to the ongoing social struggles confronting the current Tunisian revolution, but at the heart of the struggle, raising economic, political, and social questions that relate to popular sovereignty and foreign control, and how we divide the wealth of the country and achieve rights for all Tunisians.’<sup>464</sup> Confirming this conviction, the World Bank itself was to note in regards to Egypt, that ‘building trust’ was a major task, and that because it ‘provided large amounts of assistance to Egypt throughout the previous regime, it will be important to ensure that the Bank Group establishes its reputation’.<sup>465</sup> The problem, according to the Bank, was that ‘the attitude of both the new Government and the population at large towards IFIs in general and the Bank Group in particular is uncertain’ and that there exists ‘possible negative sentiments towards IFIs.’<sup>466</sup>

---

<sup>462</sup> White House Office of the Press Secretary, ‘Remarks by the President on Egypt,’ White House, 11/2/2011, [www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/02/11/remarks-president-egypt](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/02/11/remarks-president-egypt) (accessed 9/5/2011).

<sup>463</sup> Sebastian Moffett, Nathalie Boschat and William Horobin, ‘G-8 Pledges \$40 Billion for ‘Arab Spring’,’ *Wall Street Journal*, 28/5/2011 <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702304520804576348792147454956> (Accessed 9/12/2013).

<sup>464</sup> Fathi al-Shamkhy, ‘al maduneeya al-kharajeeya wa al-thawra al-Tunisiyya’ [Foreign Debt and the Tunisian Revolution], *al-thawra dai’ma*, 2 (2012): 143–146.

<sup>465</sup> World Bank Group, *Interim Strategy Note for the Arab Republic of Egypt*, (Washington D.C: World Bank, 2012), 12.

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

In this context, a noticeable shift soon became apparent in the content of IFI documents, with official representatives repeatedly insisting that they had broken with past practice and would now place much more emphasis on policies aimed at strengthening voice, transparency and consultation, and improving the living conditions of marginalised populations. The Deauville Partnership declaration pledged support for ‘reforms that promote transparency, accountability, and good governance’ in the Arab world. Likewise, country-specific strategies produced by the IMF and World Bank in the wake of the uprisings consistently highlighted issues of social and economic inclusion as key priorities of IFI policy. In the case of Tunisia, this new policy emphasis led one usually critical observer, the Washington D.C based Bank Information Center (BIC), to note that the World Bank’s ‘development narrative has shifted from praise of the high levels of economic growth ... to a focus on issues that directly impact people such as unemployment and public services, and a priority on improving governance and transparency.’<sup>467</sup> The BIC went on to characterise the World Bank as engaging in a ‘concerted effort to respond to the demands of the revolution and to include the voices of different stakeholders including civil society in its new development strategies.’<sup>468</sup> Appearing to substantiate this perception, IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde, also insisted that ‘the IMF is different from the past’ and that it would now ‘pay specific attention to the underprivileged, to the poor’.<sup>469</sup>

In light of these claims of a fresh, pro-poor direction for IFI policy in the Arab world, this article analyses recent activities of the World Bank and IMF in Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco. These three countries have been at the forefront of the renewed IFI engagement in the region. In 2012 and 2013 respectively, Morocco and Tunisia signed agreements with the IMF; the first time in two decades that new agreements had been concluded. Egypt has not yet agreed to an IMF package, although negotiations – heavily contested by different social and political forces in the country – have been

---

<sup>467</sup> Bank Information Center, ‘The World Bank Group and Tunisia,’ March 2013, <http://www.bicusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/The-World-Bank-Group-and-Tunisia-FINAL-May-10-2013.pdf>, 8 (accessed 16/9/2014).

<sup>468</sup> Ibid.

<sup>469</sup> See ‘Update on the Middle East with IMF Managing Director, Christine Lagarde,’ 3/8/2012 IMF Videos, <http://www.imf.org/external/mmedia/view.aspx?vid=1769369608001> (accessed 16/9/2014).

repeatedly resumed and put on hold since early 2011.<sup>470</sup> All three countries have been recipients of World Bank loans, with Bank officials closely involved in mapping out the strategic direction of economic policy for the coming period. While the IMF and World Bank should not be viewed in isolation from other bilateral and multilateral donors, both institutions are central to coordinating and leading IFI policy in the region.

Given renewed IFI engagement, this article examines the extent to which IMF and World Bank strategies have broken with past practice. Does the emphasis on social inclusion and voice reveal a move away from neoliberal logic, or is this merely a discursive attempt to better strengthen an appearance of popular ‘buy in’ for unpopular policies? What is the impact of popular mobilisation on IFI engagement? The article begins by outlining loan negotiations, the key project sectors targeted by donors, and the major themes of IFI strategic documents for each of the three countries. It then concludes with a comparative discussion of these experiences, with the aim of determining the degree of continuity and change in World Bank and IMF intervention in the area.

### **Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt: WB/IMF Engagement Post-2011**

The initial onset of structural adjustment in Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt had its origins in the global downturn of the 1970s and the debt crisis precipitated by the sharp rise in US interest rates that began in 1979. Morocco was the first to sign a structural adjustment package (SAP) in 1983, followed by Tunisia in 1986, and Egypt in 1991.<sup>471</sup> These SAPs closely resembled those found in other parts of the world, in which the private sector would be, as the World Bank put it, the ‘engine

---

<sup>470</sup> This article was written in Winter-Spring 2013/2014.

<sup>471</sup> Jane Harrigan and Hamed El-Said, ‘The Economic Impact of IMF and World Bank Programs in the Middle East and North Africa: A Case Study of Jordan, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia, 1983-2004,’ *Review of Middle East Economics and Finance* 6, 2 (2010): 3.

of strong and sustained growth'<sup>472</sup> – a necessary requirement of the 'new global economy' in which 'rewards... go to the most hospitable environments [for capital investment].'<sup>473</sup> Flowing from this perspective, structural adjustment measures focused on policies such as the privatisation of state-owned industries; liberalisation of ownership laws, particularly in the real estate, financial and telecommunication sectors; reduction of subsidies on food and energy; opening up to foreign investment flows; restructuring of tax regimes; deepening of financial markets; labour market deregulation; and the relaxation of trade barriers.

In the wake of the 2011 uprisings, however, the policies of previous regimes came under serious challenge from populations marginalised by neoliberal arrangements. This was a moment, according to the Egyptian economist Wael Gamal, in which alternatives to neoliberalism 'were wide open and clear, but meant a departure from the old policies and therefore would explode the new political compromise.'<sup>474</sup> While the IMF, in its report to the G8 summit at Deauville, would continue to lay key priority on supporting 'an enabling environment in which the private sector flourishes,'<sup>475</sup> popular pressure from below would demand a reversal of neoliberal policies. In Egypt, protests, strikes and factory occupations called for the renationalisation of enterprises privatized under the Mubarak regime, increases in minimum wage levels, and the expansion of social support to education and health.<sup>476</sup> Hundreds of strikes in the education sector, oil and energy, mining, ports and transport also occurred across Tunisia, with workers focusing in particular on privatisation and wage levels. In Morocco, the government was compelled to increase subsidy levels for food and fuel in an effort to prevent a repeat of its neighbors' unrest. It is this

---

<sup>472</sup> World Bank, *From Privilege to Competition: Unlocking Private-Led Growth in the Middle-East and North Africa* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2009), 1.

<sup>473</sup> World Bank, *Trade, Investment, and Development in the Middle East and North Africa: Engaging with the World* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2003), 23.

<sup>474</sup> Wael Gamal, 'al waqa'a yurfid badilkum al-waheed' [Reality Rejects Your Single Alternative], *Jadaliyya*, 17/12/2012. <http://www.jadaliyya.com> (accessed 17/12/2012).

<sup>475</sup> IMF, *Economic Transformation in MENA: Delivering on the Promise of Shared Prosperity*, IMF Staff Report to the G8 Summit (Washington, DC: IMF, 27/5/2011), 6. [www.imf.org/external/np/g8/pdf/052711.pdf](http://www.imf.org/external/np/g8/pdf/052711.pdf) (accessed 16/9/2014).

<sup>476</sup> Adam Hanieh, *Lineages of Revolt: Issues of Contemporary Capitalism in the Middle East* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013): 170-171.

unprecedented level of social and political mobilisation across all three countries that provides the context for a closer examination of World Bank and IMF engagement since 2011.

## **Tunisia**

Despite the fact that the World Bank ranks fourth in total donor support to Tunisia – behind the African Development Bank (AfDB), the European Investment Bank (EIB), and the French Development Agency (ADF) – the institution played a pivotal role in coordinating and developing donor strategy in the first year following the departure of Ben Ali. In June 2011, the WB board agreed to provide two \$500 million Development Policy Loans (DPL) as part of a \$1.3 billion multi-donor package developed in conjunction with the AfDB, the EU and the ADF. The overall strategy governing this lending programme was later articulated in the World Bank's Interim Strategy Note (ISN) of May 2012, intended to cover the term of the country's new Constituent Assembly and the transition to an elected government. The ISN highlighted three main goals of the Bank's short to medium-term work in Tunisia: (1) sustainable growth and job creation, (2) social and economic inclusion, (3) strengthening governance: voice, transparency and accountability.

A close reading of the ISN and associated loans indicates little substantive shift in the underlying assumptions and logic guiding the Bank's development strategy. As the program document for the 2012 Governance, Opportunities and Jobs DPL notes, World Bank efforts would aim principally at encouraging the Tunisian government to 'promote competition and improve the business climate', through introducing 'structural reforms [to] reduce regulatory barriers and administrative procedures; improving access to funding; as well as equal opportunities for public and private companies.' The loan objectives placed considerable emphasis on revising the rules and regulations around investment, and 'identifying opportunities for public private partnerships.' Moreover, the Bank praised the Tunisian government for its overall economic direction, commenting that: 'the tax

system will be reformed to promote investment and efficiency. Capital account liberalization will encourage FDI and investment across sectors, as well as partnerships between domestic and foreign companies. The Government is also committed to deepen integration into the global economy to boost growth.’

The most important feature to note about the content of the ISN is that this overall market-first logic forms the basis for concrete initiatives to address the three major goals of the ISN (growth and job creation; social and economic inclusion; transparency and accountability). As part of achieving ‘growth and job creation’, for example, Bank intervention aimed at sending ‘a strong signal to private investors that Tunisia is once again open for business, but this time with a more transparent and competitive environment.’ In order to do this, the Bank stated that it would support policies that open up the economy, streamline business regulations, improve competition, and, significantly, ‘reduce the onshore-offshore dichotomy and move towards a level playing field across the country’.<sup>477</sup> This latter policy thrust signalled an intent to bring the general conditions for capital accumulation more in line with those existing in the ‘offshore’ sector – it was to become a major theme in later discussions around tax rates and corporate investment incentives (see below). Within this same framework, the World Bank praised the ‘competitive edge’ that Tunisia’s ‘moderate’ wages provide for business, and advised the government to resist any pressure to increase wage levels.<sup>478</sup>

Another concrete policy highlighted under the goal of ‘growth and job creation’ is labour market deregulation. In this regard, the Bank noted, ‘Tunisia will need to engage in a series of comprehensive and politically-sensitive reforms’ that included deregulation of the labour code and increased labour market ‘flexibility’.<sup>479</sup> Instead of ‘protecting particular jobs’, labour market policy should focus on supporting workers ‘during periods of transition’ – a policy euphemistically

---

<sup>477</sup> World Bank, *Interim Strategy Note for the Republic of Tunisia, FY13-14*, 17/5/2012 (Washington D.C: World Bank Group, 2012): 16.

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 note 15.

described as a ‘lifecycle approach’.<sup>480</sup> Programmes such as AMAL – a scheme introduced in 2011 to provide assistance to unemployed graduates – were harshly criticised for their costs to the government. Instead, the World Bank urged that they be terminated or reforms introduced that limit the period and eligibility of support, reduce the level of stipends, and restrict any assistance to urban residents only.<sup>481</sup>

As part of promoting ‘social and economic inclusion’, the ISN advocated support for privatisation and the establishment of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in infrastructure, wastewater, and water supply.<sup>482</sup> Indeed, one of the requirements for World Bank loans – which was also part of the policy matrix of the AfDB’s ‘Economic Recovery and Inclusive Development Loan’ approved on the same day as the World Bank’s initial DPL – was the adoption of a draft law relating to PPPs by the Tunisian Council of Ministers, and the issuance of Prime Ministerial decree to establish a government unit for PPPs.<sup>483</sup> The proposed law was drafted under the guidance of the AfDB and the OECD, and submitted to the Constituent Assembly in October 2012. In the two rounds of discussion on the law, deputies strongly objected to the law on the grounds that it would open the country’s resources up to exploitation by foreign companies and lead to greater indebtedness. The government responded by confirming that the law was a requirement from foreign donors, and pledged to continue to push PPPs through ministerial decree.<sup>484</sup> The heated political struggles around the PPP law points to both the strategic significance of privatisation as well as the overt role played by IFIs in reworking Tunisian economic policy.

---

<sup>480</sup> Ibid., 18 note 15.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid., 18, note 16.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid., 16; 20.

<sup>483</sup> African Development Bank, ‘Grant Proposal for Financing under the MENA Transitional Fund: Operationalizing Public Private Partnership in Tunisia’ [http://www.menatransitionfund.org/sites/mena\\_trans\\_fund/files/documents/TN%20AfDB-OECD%20Operationalising%20PPP%20\(AfDB%20Project%20Document\).docx](http://www.menatransitionfund.org/sites/mena_trans_fund/files/documents/TN%20AfDB-OECD%20Operationalising%20PPP%20(AfDB%20Project%20Document).docx), 15 (accessed 16/9/2014).

<sup>484</sup> See: ‘Year 2 of the Tunisian revolution: Private profit vs. public interest,’ <http://www.brettonwoodsproject.org/2013/07/art-572840/> (accessed 2/1/2014).



These examples illustrate the manner in which deeply felt social aspirations are employed by the WB as justification for the renewal and deepening of pro-market measures. This same pattern can also be observed in the ISN's concluding remarks on the importance of public consultation and the Bank's desire to 'strengthen partnerships with Tunisian civil society and the private sector through a 'dialogue with new stakeholders''.<sup>485</sup> This dialogue is set up through consultation sessions that will constitute 'an input' into Bank strategy,<sup>486</sup> but contains no obligation to integrate perspectives that contradict the basic precepts of neoliberal policies. Not only does this model obfuscate relations of power and the different interests of 'stakeholders' – implicitly equating the voices of government representatives, business leaders, women, youth and other organisations – but also appears to be principally designed to project an image of public endorsement of Bank policy. The Bank does not disclose how it selects participants in these consultations, nor does it provide publically available transcripts of what people say. Indeed, the ISN's report of these consultation sessions contain only highly abbreviated paraphrasing that reinforce and confirm the Bank's general policy prescriptions.<sup>487</sup> Perhaps one of the most striking indications of how little popular participation is actually involved is a World Bank blog established as part of the ISN process and cited as evidence that the 'dialogue remains open'.<sup>488</sup> Between January 2012 and January 2013, the blog received a total of four postings from individuals not working for the Bank itself.

Concurrent with the development of the World Bank strategy, the Tunisian government was also involved in negotiations with the IMF from early 2011, culminating in June 2013 with the approval by the IMF Executive Board of a \$1.74 billion Stand-By Arrangement for the country. The total amount was to be disbursed over a 24-month period, with tranche payments dependent on eight program reviews conducted by the IMF over this time. Among other measures, the arrangement demanded 'wage restraint and subsidy reform ... a comprehensive reform of tax policy' and an

---

<sup>485</sup> World Bank, Interim Strategy Note for the Republic of Tunisia, FY13-14: 26.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid., 33-35.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid., 32. The blog can be found at <http://blogs.worldbank.org/arabvoices/tunisia-one-year-after-revolution-which-priorities-should-world-bank-support> (accessed 16/9/2014).

‘ambitious structural reform agenda that helps to rebuild Tunisia’s economic model by promoting private-sector development, lowering regional disparities, and reducing pervasive state intervention.’<sup>489</sup> Specific policy proposals included a pledge to reduce taxes for the corporate sector (by seeking a convergence between off-shore and on-shore tax regimes<sup>490</sup>); raising taxes for consumers (including, most controversially, an increase in vehicle tax); reform of public enterprises and the pension system; liberalising the investment environment through offering incentives to the private sector<sup>491</sup>; cut-backs to subsidies and associated increases in electricity, gas and fuel prices; decentralisation of public administration to the local government level; labour market deregulation; a salary freeze for civil service workers through 2014; and the first steps towards the corporatisation of public banks through excluding them from the law governing private enterprises.<sup>492</sup>

In early 2013, social protests emerged in the wake of the government’s attempt to implement these policies, focusing in particular on the rising cost of living, the scheduling of new fees and taxes, and cutbacks to subsidy levels. As a representative of the largest Tunisian trade union, the UGTT, was to note: ‘The IMF is dictating economic policy and people are unhappy because there is no social justice, freedom or jobs.’<sup>493</sup> In March 2013, demonstrations erupted across the country following an increase in consumer petrol prices by 6.8 per cent, a rise in the government-controlled price on milk, and the introduction of new taxes on the sale of alcohol. In the same month, the government imposed a levy of 1 per cent on salaries above 1,700 dinars (\$1,075) per month, claiming that this was necessary in order to pay for ongoing subsidies. Throughout 2013, monthly

---

<sup>489</sup> IMF, ‘IMF Executive Board Approves a 24-month US\$1.74 Billion Stand-By Arrangement with Tunisia,’ <http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2013/pr13202.htm> (accessed 5/1/2014).

<sup>490</sup> OECD, ‘Analysis of the Tunisian Tax Incentives Regime,’ March 2013, Paris. [http://www.uscib.org/docs/Tunisia\\_Tax\\_Incentives\\_Analysis.pdf](http://www.uscib.org/docs/Tunisia_Tax_Incentives_Analysis.pdf) (accessed 9/12/2013). One proposal put forward by the OECD was to implement a flat tax of around 15per cent (on-shore corporate tax is currently at 30per cent).

<sup>491</sup> This objective was captured by the IMF in the phrase ‘freedom to invest is the norm’. See IMF, ‘Tunisia: Letter of Intent, Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies, and Technical Memorandum of Understanding,’ 24/5/2013. <http://www.imf.org/external/np/loi/2013/tun/052413.pdf>, 15 (accessed 22/12/2013).

<sup>492</sup> IMF, ‘Tunisia: Letter of Intent, Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies, and Technical Memorandum of Understanding,’ 28/1/2014. <http://www.imf.org/external/np/loi/2014/tun/012814.pdf>, 13 (accessed 3/2/2014). See also <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2014/cr1450.pdf> (accessed 16/2/2014).

<sup>493</sup> Jubilee Debt Campaign, Tunisia, Case Study 9. <http://jubileedebt.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Life-and-debt-C9-Tunisia.pdf>, 45 (accessed 3/2/2014).

year-on-year inflation averaged more than 6 per cent, with non-administered food prices reaching 10.0 per cent year-on-year at end-December 2013. These figures were back at the peak levels that were reached in 2008 and 2010, prior to the ousting of Ben Ali.<sup>494</sup>

Protests against the deterioration in living conditions coincided with a period of sharp escalation in political violence, notably marked by the assassination of the respected leftist politicians Chokri Belaid on 6 February 2013, and Muhammad Brahmi on 25 July 2013. Both Belaid and Brahmi had been outspoken critics of the economic policies of the governing Islamist party, Al-Nahda, and there was widespread speculation that responsibility for their murders was linked to movements that were tacitly or directly supported by Al-Nahda. Following large-scale labour strikes and anti-government protests through the first half of 2013, Al-Nahda agreed to hand over power to a caretaker government in October 2013, leading eventually to the selection of independent political figure, Mehdi Jomaa, as interim Prime Minister in December.<sup>495</sup>

The formation of a new ‘technocratic’ government was strongly supported by the IMF and other donors, who openly noted the risk related to ‘setbacks in the political transition’ and that ‘commitment to program objectives will be tested by resistance to some necessary but not always popular reforms’.<sup>496</sup> In their programme review of the loan in January 2014, the IMF applauded the appointment of a ‘non-partisan Prime Minister [Mehdi Jomaa] ... and the formation of a new technocratic government’ as developments that ‘augur well for a greater focus on economic stabilization and an acceleration of the structural reform agenda.’<sup>497</sup> Indeed, despite ongoing protests, the general trajectory of Tunisian economic policy has not changed with the political transition. In line with the IMF agreement, the interim government increased prices of household electricity and gas by 10 per cent in January 2014, and fuel prices were pegged to rise by a further 6

---

<sup>494</sup> IMF, ‘Tunisia First and Second Reviews Under the Stand-By Arrangement,’ Country Report No. 14/50: 6.

<sup>495</sup> Jomaa assumed power on 9/1/2014.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid., 4.

per cent in July 2014.<sup>498</sup> The 2014 budget also contained measures for a 25 per cent increase in taxes on vehicles, a measure that would particularly affect taxi drivers and farmers.<sup>499</sup>

## Morocco

The World Bank has a major funding programme in Morocco that covers three specific areas. The first of these areas is support for the government's 2008 Plan Maroc Vert (Green Morocco Plan, PMV), which sets out the country's agricultural plan for the period 2008–2020. The PMV aims to quintuple the value of export-oriented crops (citrus fruits, olives, fruits, and vegetables) as one of its three main goals (the other two being to promote private investment in agriculture and to dismantle the 'segmented framework' that stands in the way of private property rights).<sup>500</sup> As part of this projected expansion of exports, the PMV endeavours to shift land away from staple cereal crops toward citrus and tomato cultivation. The core vision behind this strategy, as the World Bank noted in a 2012 Concept Note, is 'to promote the vertical integration from production to commercialization of one agri-food chain'<sup>501</sup> and represents a 'major shift from state intervention that replaces private sector to one that focuses on delivering public goods and services and developing Public Private Partnerships (PPPs)'.<sup>502</sup> According to the consulting firm McKinsey & Company, three hundred thousand hectares were initially earmarked for this transition, and more than half have already been switched to export crops.<sup>503</sup> The World Bank's support for the PMV was carried out through two Development Policy Loans worth \$205 million in March 2011 and

---

<sup>498</sup> IMF, Tunisia: Letter of Intent, 28/1/2014: 9.

<sup>499</sup> Following widespread protests against this tax in January 2014, the government agreed to postpone the measure until confirmation from the legislative branch.

<sup>500</sup> See the text of the PMV at Agency for Agricultural Development, Kingdom of Morocco, <http://www.ada.gov.ma/StrategiePMV.php> (accessed 16/9/2014).

<sup>501</sup> World Bank, *Morocco Social and Integrated Agriculture*, Project Information Document, Concept Note (Washington, DC: World Bank, 4/3/2012), 1.

<sup>502</sup> IBRD, 'First Development Policy Loan in Support of the Plan Maroc Vert,' 10/2/2011. [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2011/03/17/000333037\\_20110317000518/Rendered/PDF/584990PGD0REPL194B01public031151111.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2011/03/17/000333037_20110317000518/Rendered/PDF/584990PGD0REPL194B01public031151111.pdf), 3 (Accessed 5/3/2012).

<sup>503</sup> Sunil Sanghvi, Rupert Simons, and Roberto Uchoa, 'Four Lessons for Transforming African Agriculture,' *McKinsey Quarterly* (2011): 4.

\$203 million in March 2013, representing around 18 per cent of the Bank's total funding of US\$2.2 billion from 2011 to 2014.<sup>504</sup>

The second major area of World Bank funding to Morocco is support of the country's National Initiative for Human Development (INDH). King Muhammad VI launched this programme in a May 2005 address to the country, with the stated goals of fighting poverty, illiteracy and social exclusion, and enhancing local participation in decision-making. The main features of the INDH scheme are (i) the decentralisation of governance through the funding of small-scale social infrastructure contracts (in areas such as construction, road and street infrastructure, electricity or water supply, sanitation or solid waste services, schools, local health centers or community centers, public gardens, sports or other public facilities, etc.), and (ii) financial support for developing small, local businesses that generate revenues for the local communities.<sup>505</sup> From 2006 to 2010, around \$1.2 billion was allocated to the INDH from the national budget, with 20 per cent of this amount coming from foreign donors (notably, the World Bank, the EU, Saudi Arabia).<sup>506</sup>

The World Bank has been an enthusiastic supporter of the INDH since its inception, first through a \$100 million loan in 2006, and more recently with a \$300 million loan in June 2012. Despite the laudable goals of the programme, it has come under sharp criticism from Moroccan activists and scholars, who have highlighted the way it has contributed to the monarchy's ability to 'exercise control and co-opt NGOs, inducing the latter to carry out the social functions entrusted to the state ... [it] has also created an artificial and non-independent civil society sphere that tends to receive significant funds and media coverage, both domestically and externally.'<sup>507</sup> Moreover, the

---

<sup>504</sup> Calculated from [worldbank.org](http://worldbank.org).

<sup>505</sup> World Bank, 'Project Appraisal Document for a National Initiative for Human Development 2 Program,' 4/6/2012. [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2012/07/05/000350881\\_20120705105018/Rendered/PDF/674960PAD0REVIOLIC0diclosed07030120.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2012/07/05/000350881_20120705105018/Rendered/PDF/674960PAD0REVIOLIC0diclosed07030120.pdf), 71 (Accessed 18/12/2013).

<sup>506</sup> Koenraad Bogaert, *Urban Politics in Morocco: Uneven Development, Neoliberal Government and State Power*, Dissertation, Department of Conflict and Development Studies, University of Gent (2011): 140.

<sup>507</sup> Silvia Colombo, 'Morocco at the Crossroads: Seizing the window of opportunity for sustainable development,' MEDPRO Technical Report 2 (2011). [http://www.iai.it/pdf/mediterraneo/MedPro/MedPro-technical-paper\\_02.pdf](http://www.iai.it/pdf/mediterraneo/MedPro/MedPro-technical-paper_02.pdf), 9 (accessed 16/9/2014).

program's primary emphasis on the decentralisation of fiscal administration, and the requirement that recipients provide a minimum 10 per cent financial or in-kind contribution to projects,<sup>508</sup> have further entrenched the shift towards the private provision of services. One clear example of this is the involvement of one of the world's largest utilities company, GDF-Suez, through its subsidiary LYDEC, in the supply of electricity to urban shantytowns in Morocco.<sup>509</sup> LYDEC's supply is organized through INDH, in which local small-scale representatives take responsibility for the distribution of services and collection of payment to slum neighborhoods. In this manner, as Bogaert has pointed out, INDH helps to deepen the '*marketization and privatization of the social ...* [a process that] implies the relocation of the centre of gravity of welfare and social development to the private sphere and private actors.'<sup>510</sup>

In addition to the PMV and INDH, the third major focus of World Bank funding in the post-2011 period has been a range of policy development and project specific loans framed by the Bank's Country Partnership Strategy (2010-2013), adopted in January 2010. Despite the regional changes that have ensued since that time, the essential thrust of the CPS has remained the same, although a May 2012 review noted that the Bank would seek to 'support more ambitious reforms', with a particular focus on policies aimed at increasing economic competitiveness, governance, cut-backs to the country's subsidy program, and 'strengthening inclusion and voice, particularly of youth and women'.<sup>511</sup> The Bank's disbursement levels to Morocco reached record levels in 2011 and 2012,<sup>512</sup> with a major emphasis of these loans placed on promoting the use of PPPs within key sectors. In this regard, loans have included a \$136.7 million DPL in June 2012, which aimed, in part, at the

---

<sup>508</sup> World Bank, Project Appraisal Document for a National Initiative for Human Development 2 Program: 65.

<sup>509</sup> See World Business Council for Sustainable Development, 'GDF SUEZ – LYDEC: Household access to energy, water and sanitation services in Greater Casablanca, Case Study' <http://www.wbcsd.org/Pages/EDocument/EDocumentDetails.aspx?ID=14169&NoSearchContextKey=true> (accessed 3/2/2014).

<sup>510</sup> Bogaert, *Urban Politics in Morocco: Uneven Development, Neoliberal Government and State Power*, 226.

<sup>511</sup> World Bank, 'Country Partnership Strategy Progress Report for the Period FY10-13.' [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2012/05/21/000333037\\_20120521001658/Rendered/PDF/676940CAS0R2010se0Only090Box369244B.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2012/05/21/000333037_20120521001658/Rendered/PDF/676940CAS0R2010se0Only090Box369244B.pdf), 13 (accessed 23/1/2014).

<sup>512</sup> Ibid., 8.

development of PPPs in the urban transit sector<sup>513</sup>, a US\$200 million loan in November 2011 for the support of a \$1.4 billion PPP in solar energy (jointly with the EIB, KfW; AfDB and AFD), and a \$130 million DPL in February 2013 to help develop a PPP for solid waste management.

One final significant example of this stepped-up World Bank intervention in Moroccan government policy has been the push towards constitutional reform that embeds fiscal austerity as a guiding principle of the state's finances and budgetary processes. The new constitution adopted in 2011 contains an important requirement that the 'finances of the state' remain 'in balance' (Article 77).<sup>514</sup> This constitutional requirement on public finances underpins a new draft Organic Budgetary Law (OBL), prepared with the assistance of the World Bank<sup>515</sup>, which as its principle goal has the reduction of government spending on wages and subsidies.<sup>516</sup> In a program document for a \$200 million loan provided in September 2013 to assist in the development and implementation of budgetary policy, the Bank explicitly acknowledges the link between constitutional reform and the structural embedding of neoliberal logic within economic policy making, noting that 'the new constitutional requirement' means that the Government has committed to reducing budget deficits and accelerating the reform process.<sup>517</sup> The Bank went on to list some of the measures carried out by the Government in line with these reforms, including a reduction in subsidies for wheat farmers, an increase in fuel, gasoline and diesel prices, control of government wages, and a 6per cent

---

<sup>513</sup> World Bank, 'Development Policy Loan for the Urban Transport Sector,' 27/6/2012. [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2012/07/19/000386194\\_20120719005139/Rendered/PDF/ICR21870P115650C0disclosed070170120.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2012/07/19/000386194_20120719005139/Rendered/PDF/ICR21870P115650C0disclosed070170120.pdf), 12 (accessed 25/1/2014).

<sup>514</sup> AfDb, 'Financial Sector Development Support Programme – Phase II,' Morocco, August 2011. <http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Project-and-Operations/Morocco%20-%20Financial%20sector%20development%20programme%20-%20phase%20II.pdf>, 20 (accessed 27/1/2014).

<sup>515</sup> IMF, 'Second Review Under the Precautionary and Liquidity Line,' September 2013: 14, note 7. <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2013/cr13302.pdf> (accessed 25/1/2014).

<sup>516</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>517</sup> World Bank, 'First Transparency and Accountability Development Policy Loan,' 30/9/2013. [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2013/10/09/000333037\\_20131009170139/Rendered/PDF/721270PGD0Moro0100OU00900Box379843B.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2013/10/09/000333037_20131009170139/Rendered/PDF/721270PGD0Moro0100OU00900Box379843B.pdf), 9 (accessed 9/1/2014).

reduction in subsidies on wheat.<sup>518</sup>

As with Tunisia, the activities of the World Bank and other IFIs in Morocco have been closely coordinated with the IMF, although there has been no specific IMF programme launched in the country beyond the annual Article IV consultations. In August 2012, however, the IMF Executive Board approved a 24-month Precautionary and Liquidity Line (PLL), valued at around \$6.2 billion, which could be used in the event of a severe balance of payments crisis caused by deterioration in the international economic situation. While Morocco had not drawn upon this credit line as of February 2014, it is important to emphasise that it comes with its own set of conditionalities, expressed in a Letter of Intent sent to the IMF Executive Board on July 27, 2012. The letter pledges ‘rationalization and efficiency of public spending’ through measures including subsidy and pension reform, with a targeted 1.6 percentage point drop in the fiscal deficit/GDP between 2011 and 2013.<sup>519</sup> Other planned structural reforms include removing barriers to business entry, rationalizing tariffs, labor market deregulation<sup>520</sup>, and preparing some public enterprises for privatisation.<sup>521</sup>

## Egypt

IFI activities in Egypt have been highly contested over many decades, due to the widespread perception that organisations such as the World Bank and IMF were directly complicit with the corruption of the Mubarak regime. After the ousting of Mubarak, much of the popular ire has centred upon negotiations for a new IMF loan to Egypt, which began in April and May 2011 during IMF mission visits to the country. Despite the large social mobilisations around the questions of

---

<sup>518</sup> Food subsidies were reduced by 15per cent in September 2012, while fuel prices were increased by 20per cent in June 2012. EBRD, ‘EBRD Supports Expansion in Water Services in Morocco,’ 29/1/2014. <http://www.ebrd.com/english/pages/news/press/2014/140129.shtml> (accessed 9/2/2014).

<sup>519</sup> IMF, ‘Morocco Letter of Intent,’ 27/7/2012. <http://www.imf.org/external/np/loi/2012/mar/072712.pdf>, 3 (accessed 9/2/2014).

<sup>520</sup> IMF, ‘Morocco: Request for an Arrangement Under the Precautionary and Liquidity Line,’ August 2012. <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2012/cr12239.pdf>, 11 (accessed 9/2/2014).

<sup>521</sup> Ibid., 2.



debt and social justice, a staff-level agreement was initially concluded on 5 June 2011 between the government and the IMF for a \$3 billion loan. Just two weeks later, however, the Egyptian Finance Minister Samir Radwan announced that plans to accept the loan had been dropped, with one of his advisors noting that this was a result of the ‘pressure of public opinion’.<sup>522</sup> Discussions nonetheless continued between the government and the IMF, revolving specifically around an economic plan that would form the precondition of any future loan. When the plan was eventually released in November 2011 due to public pressure, activists noted the close resemblance between its recommendations and the IMF Article IV consultation that took place with the Mubarak government in April 2010 – particularly the plans to reduce subsidies and public spending, and introduce a VAT rather than any progressive tax reform.<sup>523</sup>

In August 2012 – following the election of Muhammad Mursi to the presidency in June 2012 – the Egyptian government made a formal application to the IMF to resume negotiations on a loan, this time for a new amount of \$4.8 billion. An initial agreement was signed in November 2012, accompanied by an announcement of austerity measures that met the approval of the IMF.<sup>524</sup> Once again, however, a final loan agreement did not go ahead. Following protests over the new taxes and cutbacks to social spending, and more general discontent with the Muslim Brotherhood government, the Egyptian finance ministry announced on 10 December that the IMF loan would be postponed. Nonetheless, despite this postponement, many of the austerity measures linked to the IMF agreement remained in place, provoking a record number of protests and strikes. According to the International Development Centre in Cairo, there was an average of more than 1100 protests per month in the first half of 2013, with a record 9427 protests held during the first year of Mursi's term

---

<sup>522</sup> BBC News, ‘Egypt drops plans for IMF loan amid popular distrust,’ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-13914410> (accessed 8/12/2013).

<sup>523</sup> Proceeding of the Panel Discussion, From the Arab revolutions to global austerity trends, 22/4/2013. <http://www.brettonwoodsproject.org/2013/04/art-572426/> (accessed 8/12/2013).

<sup>524</sup> Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, ‘Amended tax laws and postponed implementation: The Worst is yet to Come,’ 16/12/2012. <http://eipr.org/en/pressrelease/2012/12/16/1563> (accessed 8/12/2013).

(July 2012 to June 2013).<sup>525</sup> These protests included more than 1000 strikes, 800 sit-ins, over 500 marches, and campaigns of refusing to pay bills on utilities such as electricity and water.

Throughout this entire period, it was broadly acknowledged that an IMF package was a necessary prerequisite before wider lending began from other IFIs, and its absence meant that donor activity was muted through 2011-2013. The World Bank, for example, funded only eight projects over this period, for a total value of just over \$1.6 billion (compared to \$2.17 billion in 2010 alone),<sup>526</sup> and stated unambiguously that any significant levels of funding – including Development Policy Loans of up to \$1 billion – would be largely dependent upon Egypt's acceptance of an agreement with the IMF.<sup>527</sup> Likewise, the AfDB approved only four projects for Egypt in 2011, and none in 2012, commenting in its 2012 strategy document that 'development partners are unlikely to come forward unless an agreement between the IMF and Egypt is reached first.'<sup>528</sup> The European Investment Bank, through its FEMIP instrument, provided \$512 million worth of loans to Egypt from 2011 to 2013, compared to over \$900 million in 2010 alone. Some support was forthcoming from Saudi Arabia and Qatar through 2011, but the major promises of financial aid made at the Deauville Summit did not materialize. The significance of the IMF package was explicitly acknowledged by US Secretary of State John Kerry during a visit to Cairo in early March 2013, in which he commented that Washington would release \$190 million of a pledged \$450 million in budget support to Egypt, only on the assurance that the country would 'complete the IMF process.'<sup>529</sup>

Nonetheless, despite the delays in an IMF package, there appears to be a strong consensus

---

<sup>525</sup> Al Ahram, 'Egypt Protests hit all time high during Morsi's first year,' 25/2/2013. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/74939.aspx> (accessed 9/12/2013).

<sup>526</sup> Calculated by author from world bank website.

<sup>527</sup> World Bank, 'Interim Strategy Note for the Arab Republic of Egypt,' 31/5/2012. [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2012/06/07/000333037\\_20120607004504/Rendered/PDF/664430ISN0R2010OfficialUseOnly090.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2012/06/07/000333037_20120607004504/Rendered/PDF/664430ISN0R2010OfficialUseOnly090.pdf), 14 (accessed 16/9/2014).

<sup>528</sup> AfDB, 2012-2013 Egypt Interim Strategy Note, October 2012. [http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Project-and-Operations/2012-2013 - Egypt - Interim Strategy Paper.pdf](http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Project-and-Operations/2012-2013_-_Egypt_-_Interim_Strategy_Paper.pdf), 4 (accessed 9/12/2014).

<sup>529</sup> Rebecca Nelson and Jeremy Sharp, 'Egypt and the IMF: Overview and Issues for Congress,' Congressional Research Service, 29/4/2013, 14.

among major IFIs over the direction of donor activities once an agreement is in place and the political situation has stabilised. This consensus is clearly expressed in the World Bank's Interim Strategy Note (ISN), issued in May 2012, which covers the Bank's activities over an 18-month period (June 2012 through December 2013).<sup>530</sup> The first apparent feature of this report is the Bank's major concern over Egyptian public perception around IFIs and the private sector, and hence the need to 'work closely with all new political actors, [to] help restore the confidence of the private sector and improve public perceptions of the private sector.'<sup>531</sup> Moreover, because of the 'possible negative sentiments towards IFIs', the Bank pledged to 'engage with a broad set of stakeholders, including members of political parties and Parliamentarians, as well as CSOs and youth leaders, and ... make further efforts at outreach and consultations.'<sup>532</sup>

The Bank deals with these fears over messaging and perception in much the same manner as it did in the Tunisian and Moroccan cases. The three basic objectives of the ISN – economic management, jobs, and inclusion – encompass the broad social aspirations of the 2011 popular movements, but these are to be achieved primarily through encouraging private sector growth and fiscal austerity measures. This logic is starkly indicated in the list of key expected outcomes of the Bank's efforts to achieve these objectives: reduction and phasing-out of subsidies; an enhanced investment environment measured through an improvement in Doing Business rankings; deepening of financial markets and credit provision; privatisation (through PPPs) for air, power, energy, telecommunications, road management, irrigation, and hospitals; trade integration with global markets; pension reform; and training in entrepreneurship (particularly for women).<sup>533</sup> It is striking that even those measures proposed in order to achieve 'inclusion' are largely framed around private sector growth and fiscal austerity, including PPPs, subsidy and pension reform, and increased incorporation of women into financial markets. Indeed, confirming its absolute commitment to

---

<sup>530</sup> The ISN replaced an earlier Country Assistance Strategy 2006-2009 (CAS), which had first been drafted in 2005 and later extended to end-2011.

<sup>531</sup> World Bank, Interim Strategy Note for the Arab Republic of Egypt, 12.

<sup>532</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>533</sup> See Annex I, ISN, for more detail. Ibid., 12.

these priorities, the Bank notes that a key risk to its work in Egypt is the fact that ‘reforms aimed at improving the environment for private investment may be deeply unpopular’ and that the Egyptian government may be pressured to ‘respond to public opinion by introducing re-nationalization or tighter state control over the private sector.’<sup>534</sup>

Both the Bank’s earlier Country Assistance Strategy (CAS 2006-2009) and the ISN contain a major focus on the energy sector. Indeed, around 2/3 of World Bank project funding since 2011 has gone towards two power projects – \$240 million for the Giza North power plant in February 2012 and \$585.4 million for the construction of the Helwan South plant in June 2013.<sup>535</sup> In the medium-term, these projects are explicitly framed by the World Bank as fostering the commercialisation of electricity generation in Egypt,<sup>536</sup> in which power would be produced by privately-owned Independent Power Producers (IPPs), sold to the Egyptian Electricity Holding Company (EEHC), and then purchased by the consumer.<sup>537</sup> A key enabler of this liberalisation process is higher electricity prices through the removal of energy subsidies and, in this manner, the World Bank’s investment in the energy sector is closely linked to the goal of subsidy reform. Indeed, the Project Document for the Helwan South plant emphasises this goal as a key element of World Bank support, noting that final approval of the project had ‘awaited credible first steps to be taken by the Government to reform electricity tariffs and fuel subsidies’,<sup>538</sup> which were forthcoming with the increase of electricity tariffs by a total of 15per cent under the Mursi government in November 2012 and January 2013 during negotiations with the IMF.<sup>539</sup> The Bank goes on to note that ‘further electricity tariffs and fuel subsidy reforms’ would be necessary to achieve full commercialisation of the electricity sector, and that it expected electricity tariffs ‘to increase at 7.5per cent per annum

---

<sup>534</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>535</sup> Calculated by author from World Bank website.

<sup>536</sup> World Bank, Interim Strategy Note for the Arab Republic of Egypt, 21.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>539</sup> Ibid., 11.

during FY2014-2018... and 3per cent thereafter.’<sup>540</sup>

Since the ousting of Mursi by the Egyptian military in July 2013, IFI engagement with the country has slowed while donors await the outcome of the new political environment. Further negotiations around the IMF package have been put on hold, with the IMF announcing soon after the overthrow of Mursi that it would keep its contact with the country on a technical level until the military-led government received international recognition. Nonetheless, the general strategic consensus of the IMF and other IFIs remains unchanged. According to the IMF’s report to the October 2013 Deauville Partnership Ministerial Meeting, the medium-term strategy necessitated: ‘promoting the role of the private sector [to] unleash Egypt’s underexploited economic potential ... The immediate task is to streamline burdensome regulations, improve access to financing, and modernise insolvency and land management laws ... removing bottlenecks to investment in the electricity and transport sectors ... regaining control of public expenditures, including reforming energy subsidies and containing the wage bill.’<sup>541</sup>

## **Rearticulating Continuities in Political Transition**

A comparative examination of each of these three cases indicates little change in the essential logic of World Bank and IMF involvement in North Africa. All of the major World Bank/IMF strategic documents and loan agreements continue to be underpinned by a prioritisation of private-sector driven growth, fiscal austerity focusing particularly on subsidy and pension reform, and the liberalisation of financial and labour markets. This policy continuity is acknowledged by the World Bank in its ISNs for Tunisia and Egypt, which differ little from the earlier Country Assistance Strategies that were cancelled following the overthrow of Ben Ali and Mubarak. In Morocco, the

---

<sup>540</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>541</sup> IMF, ‘Arab Countries in Transition: Economic Outlook and Key Challenges,’ Report to the Deauville Partnership Ministerial Meeting, 10/10/2013. <http://www.imf.org/external/np/pp/eng/2013/101013.pdf>, 10 (accessed 9/1/2014).

World Bank continues to follow the same Country Partnership Strategy that it adopted in 2010. IMF agreements with Morocco and Tunisia are based upon Article IV consultations from prior to 2011, and even in the case of Egypt – the only country not to agree to an IMF package – the national plan that forms the precondition of any future IMF agreement is largely drawn from Article IV recommendations made to the Mubarak government in April 2010.

Nevertheless, despite the strong continuities in both the logic and content of overall strategy, there are differences in IFI engagement with each country. In Morocco, the lack of any significant regime transformation has meant that IFIs have continued to build upon earlier projects in the country, linked to the long-standing country development strategies of the PMV and INDH in which decentralisation of fiscal and administrative authority plays such a prominent role. Both the World Bank and IMF – working closely with other IFIs – have utilised calls for greater transparency to deepen attempts to embed market-oriented policies within the state, reflected most sharply in the constitutional reform process. In Tunisia and Egypt, however, where previous rulers have been ousted (although a strong degree of elite and regime continuity remains), IFI engagement has faced much more significant resistance from the population and policy has been more cautious. The levels of strikes, demonstrations and other forms of popular protest have been high in both countries, and have focused on the question of IMF/World Bank participation. In the case of Egypt, this opposition has prevented any conclusion of an IMF deal, despite the apparent consensus around such an agreement from all sections of the elite.

Indeed, in all three countries, state and business elites have not raised any significant opposition to IFI negotiations or the policies associated with them. In Tunisia and Egypt, where Islamist forces initially played a dominant role in new governmental arrangements post-2011, IFI negotiations were to continue along the same trajectory as under previous rulers, despite the claims of both Al-Nahda and the Muslim Brotherhood to greater social justice aspirations. In both countries, the wave of liberalisation policies that took place from mid-2012 to early 2013 was carried out under the

tutelage of these organisations and was widely praised in World Bank and IMF reports. In Tunisia, the ‘technocratic’ government that replaced Al-Nahda has continued these policies. The Egyptian case remains in flux as a result of the political instability and violence that accompanied the overthrow of Muhammad Mursi in mid-2013, but the new cabinet announced in late February 2014 is dominated by Mubarak-era officials and old business elites – with the pivotal finance and planning ministries held by individuals responsible for previous negotiations with the IMF.<sup>542</sup> In all cases, the continuity in elite attitudes towards IFI-backed policies on the one hand, and the varied levels of mass mobilisation on the other, confirms the importance of incorporating popular struggles into any analysis of political transition.

Moreover, the generalised popular distrust of IFIs is frankly acknowledged by both the IMF and World Bank, and helps explain their discursive turn towards issues such as job creation, social inclusion, transparency and governance. The preceding discussion indicates that this ‘pro-poor’ discourse should not be understood as a sharp break from earlier policy, but rather represents an attempt to ensure continuity in the context of problems of perception and legitimacy. Job creation, for example, is to be achieved through privatisation, further opening up of the economy to foreign investment and labour market deregulation. Social inclusion, as the Moroccan and Tunisian cases confirm, is to be operationalised through the downward displacement of budgetary processes to the local level, accompanied by privatisation and fee-based service provision. In these and other examples outlined above, widely held social aspirations are acknowledged as legitimate priorities, but because their implementation is conceived through the overarching framework of a market-led policy, their symbolic function is to reinforce and justify the core neoliberal orientation. The final aspect to this discursive shift is the World Bank/IMF’s greater concern with public perception – reflected in frequent references to stakeholders, consultations, and the need to build popular

---

<sup>542</sup> See Ahram Online, ‘Ministers in Egypt’s new cabinet,’ 1/3/2014, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/95299/Egypt/Politics-/UPDATED-PROFILES-Ministers-in-Egypt-s-new-cabinet.aspx> (accessed 16/9/2014).

support. As was noted above in the Tunisian case, these claims of greater ‘voice, transparency and accountability’ should be viewed with some skepticism. They have not altered the basic trajectory of IFI policy in any significant manner, and appear to be primarily aimed at generating a facade of popular participation and endorsement of IMF/World Bank strategy.

In summary, IFI engagement with Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt since 2011 demonstrates an attempt to articulate dissent in the image of neoliberalism, rendering North Africa’s uprisings within a discourse amenable to the deepening of pro-market policies. IFIs have attempted to utilise the post-2011 moment to maintain the essential characteristics of past practice, while employing a language that professes a new course and sympathy with the social justice goals of the uprisings. Nonetheless, ongoing social mobilisations have sharply affected the trajectories of this process, and remain of significant concern to policy makers. In this context, the deepening engagement of IFIs with North Africa will likely constitute a key axis of ongoing debates over the future of new political arrangements in the region.



# No democratic change... and yet no authoritarian continuity. The inter-paradigm debate and North Africa after the uprisings

FRANCESCO CAVATORTA<sup>543</sup>

*ABSTRACT North Africa has gone through dramatic events since the eruption of the Arab uprisings in Tunisia in late 2010. Despite sharing similar characteristics that were central to the uprisings, they have known different political and institutional trajectories since then. The article provides an appraisal of the contributions to this special issue focusing in particular on the peculiar situation of countries where no genuine democratic change has occurred and where there is little authoritarian continuity as well.*

The Arab uprisings have generated an enormous amount of literature since early 2011 when the presidents of both Egypt and Tunisia were forced out of power through sustained popular revolts against their rule, setting off a wave of unrest across the region. Broadly speaking, the early enthusiasm of the early days has been replaced by more pessimistic analyses as events on the ground seemed to throw the entire region further into political chaos and, in many cases, violence. The academic focus on analyses of the positive role of social media, the mobilisation of the youth, the strength of civil society activism, or the modernisation of party politics have been supplanted by studies examining the rise of sectarianism, the re-affirmation of the importance of the military and security forces, and the de-politicisation and disenchantment of ordinary citizens. In light of this extremely varied and often contradictory academic and policy-oriented literature on the Arab uprisings and their causes and consequences, it becomes very difficult to provide a balanced appraisal of what has genuinely changed in the region and what has remained unaltered. In addition, one should not forget that the regional variation is also very significant in terms of political developments following the uprisings. The trajectories of Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt – to use the country-studies in this special issue – are extremely different and can be considered in part at odds with each other. Finally, the time-lag since the uprisings is not particularly long and what might seem as a massive change today might end up being much less in the near future so and vice-versa.

More broadly, enthusiasm and pessimism about the uprisings and their consequences correlate quite strongly with the paradigms of democratisation and authoritarian persistence respectively. This special issue attempts to move beyond the conceptualisation of North African politics through this rigid debate and suggests that elements of change and continuity should not be framed necessarily within the dominant paradigms, largely because of their normative assumptions about the outcome of the uprisings. This attempt is in line with recent

---

<sup>543</sup> Department of Political Science, Université Laval. Email: francesco.cavatorta@pol.ulaval.ca

calls to widen the research agenda on Middle East politics in order to better capture the trends and hidden forces that operate within North African societies outside the at times facile assumptions of both paradigms.<sup>544</sup> This would allow not only for better understanding, but also for formulating better predictions and avoid the 'surprise' of 2011. In addition the special issue takes contributions greatly to better specify the ways in which politics across North Africa have developed since the uprisings, providing insights on their historical and political trends beyond the immediacy of events. While the introduction and the contributions attempt, as mentioned, to steer clear of the debate between the 'rival' paradigms of authoritarian persistence and democratisation, it is difficult to completely marginalise them as potential useful frameworks through which one can make sense of political events in North Africa since the uprisings. The desire to move away from these paradigms has largely to do with their normativity and their theoretical rigidity, which are quite difficult to disentangle. However, as argued elsewhere,<sup>545</sup> such paradigms can still be quite useful if one does not think of the insights of democratisation for instance as capable of explaining all political developments in any authoritarian or semi-authoritarian countries at all times and in a linear manner. The same applies to the authoritarian persistence paradigm. Once this is accepted it is possible to engage critically with both when providing an appraisal of post-Spring North Africa.<sup>546</sup> The point is not to believe that their insights will inevitably lead to the normative outcome in-built in them and be prepared to look at change and continuity as a process of constant and at times contradictory adaptation to forms of governance that seem to point increasingly to a convergence between what once were neatly separate authoritarian and democratic countries and political systems.

## No democratic change

The Arab uprisings gave rise early on to the rediscovery of the democratisation literature that had been abandoned in the late 1990s and early 2000s in favour of the literature on authoritarian resilience. In some writings about the uprisings 'the spirit of 1989' was evoked<sup>547</sup> and it was believed that processes of transition to democracy were under way across North Africa, with the exception of Algeria where the 'Spring' never really arrived,<sup>548</sup> but where, keeping in line with the democratisation paradigm, it would eventually come.

---

<sup>544</sup> Marc Morjé Howard and Meir R. Walters, 'Response to Eva Bellin, Ellen Lust and Marc Lynch,' *Perspectives on Politics* 12, 2 (2014): 417-419.

<sup>545</sup> Michelle Pace and Francesco Cavatorta, 'The Arab uprisings in theoretical perspectives,' *Mediterranean Politics* 17, 2 (2012): 125-138.

<sup>546</sup> Frédéric Volpi, 'Explaining (and re-explaining) political change in the Middle East during the Arab Spring: trajectories of democratization and authoritarianism in the Maghreb,' *Democratization* 20, 6 (2013): 969-990.

<sup>547</sup> See for instance Mary Kaldor, 'Civil Society in 1989 and 2011,' 7/02/2011 <http://www.opendemocracy.net/mary-kaldor/civil-society-in-1989-and-2011> and the Al Jazeera special focus, 'The Arab world 1989's revolution?' <http://www.aljazeera.com/focus/2011/02/201121165427186924.html> (both accessed 26/9/2014).

<sup>548</sup> Frédéric Volpi, 'Algeria versus the Arab Spring,' *Journal of Democracy* 24, 3 (2013): 104-115.

Elsewhere, it was argued, political parties and social actors would have to work out the details of the institutional compromises needed in order to arrive satisfactorily at the creation of liberal-democratic systems that would certainly have teething problems, but would eventually consolidate once all involved realised that liberal-democracy was indeed some sort of 'end of history.' The focus is often therefore on the problems that transiting countries face<sup>549</sup> and on the ways in which the transition failed with attention being paid to the interactions among actors.<sup>550</sup> As it turns out, none of the contributions to the special issues point to democratic change as we have traditionally understood in the democratisation literature and in fact emphasise that the reality under examination is far from being capable of delivering democratic change in the way in which it is conceived in that literature. In the case of Egypt, as Kohstall makes clear, the intention to genuinely democratise was never present at the core of the regime – the military – and using the case of higher education reform, he argues convincingly that the authoritarian retrenchment is such that ideal loci of debate, critical thinking and scientific inquiry, such as third level institutions, are perceived as security threats and therefore need to be monitored closely. This is in keeping with developments elsewhere in Egyptian society, from stamping out labour disputes to repressing the Muslim Brotherhood and other dissenters. Interestingly, it is also in line with the progressive securitization of issues and places across the globe, liberal-democracies included. In Morocco, either through the apt manipulation of the reform on regional decentralisation or through the concessions provided to potentially rebellious public sector unions, the tried and tested strategies of co-optation have permitted the Monarchy to reassert its pre-eminence on the political system.<sup>551</sup> According to Fabio Merone, in Tunisia as well, considered to be either on the way to democratic consolidation<sup>552</sup> or the last hope of at least one successful transition to democracy in the Arab world,<sup>553</sup> a real transition to democracy capable of consolidating has not yet occurred. In fact one of his main arguments is that the uprising of 2011 has 'simply' permitted the re-integration of a conservative middle-class represented by the Islamist party Al-Nahda, which some would consider as having lost its Islamist ideological core long ago,<sup>554</sup> into the national project of state-building without altering the significant class cleavages in the country. Thus, a mass of deeply disenfranchised and marginalised people feel no real connection to the political system being constructed, preferring to become involved in *jihadi* Salafism or radical left-wing activism or to withdraw completely from institutional politics. In this context it is difficult to see how new political institutions can be legitimated and how they can build meaningful democratic participation of citizens. This absence of genuine democratic change in East Europe-style is exemplified in the adoption of new constitutions, which

---

<sup>549</sup> Ann Lesch, 'Troubled political transitions: Tunisia, Egypt and Libya,' *Middle East Policy* 21, 1 (2014): 62-74.

<sup>550</sup> Nathan Brown, 'Egypt's failed transition,' *Journal of Democracy* 24, 4 (2013): 45-58.

<sup>551</sup> Ahmed Benchemsi, 'Morocco: outfoxing the opposition,' *Journal of Democracy* 23, 1 (2012): 57-69; Emanuela Dalmasso, 'Surfing the democratic tsunami in Morocco: apolitical society and the reconfiguration of a sustainable authoritarian regime,' *Mediterranean Politics* 17, 2 (2012): 217-232.

<sup>552</sup> Alfred Stepan, 'Tunisia's transition and the twin tolerations,' *Journal of Democracy* 23, 2 (2012): 89-103.

<sup>553</sup> Steven Heydemann, 'Syria and the future of authoritarianism,' *Journal of Democracy* 24, 4 (2013): 59-73.

<sup>554</sup> See Alaya Allani, 'The Islamists in Tunisia between confrontation and participation: 1980-2008,' *Journal of North African Studies* 14, 2 (2009): 257-272 and Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone, 'Moderation through exclusion? The journey of the Tunisian *Ennahda* from fundamentalist to conservative party,' *Democratization* 20, 5 (2013): 857-875.

constrain rather than liberate and that entrench semi-authoritarian practices rather than fundamentally challenging them, as Parolin argues in his contribution. This might be slightly unfair on the Tunisian constitution and the efforts of both political and social actors to come up with a document that would enshrine the broad consensus on democratic mechanisms and individual freedoms that has held since the departure of Ben Ali. However, as both Merone and Parolin outline, the nature of such consensus is limited to the middle-class and entails the significant 'recycling' of old elites – whether political or intellectual – into power. This is not to mention the new Egyptian constitution drafted in the aftermath of the 2013 military coup or the provisions in the new Moroccan constitution, which, as tradition dictates, do not fundamentally alter the political and religious primacy of the Monarch.

This absence of genuine democratic change together with the recycling or return of old elites to positions of power and prominence is in part the outcome of the inability and unwillingness of a set of political and social actors to fundamentally challenge embedded economic practices linked to neo-liberalism; an aspect to which many contributions directly or indirectly refer to as being of significant importance in understanding how these polities operate. As shown in a number of works on the causes of the Arab uprisings, the socio-economic question was central to the demands of protestors across the region.<sup>555</sup> The continued post-uprisings failure to improve living standards, reduce unemployment and reverse widening income distribution has undermined political processes across North Africa. There are two broad reasons that can contribute to explain such failure. First is the role of international actors, namely international financial institutions. As Hanieh illustrates in his contribution, negotiations with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank following the uprisings did not lead to a fundamental rethink of the economic practices in place. On the contrary, the continuity of such economic practices and the unwillingness to recognise their deleterious effects on an increasing amount of individuals stands out starkly. In part this derives from the misplaced belief on the part of international financial institutions – but also of the European Union through its trade policy and its commercial agreements<sup>556</sup> – that neo-liberal reforms had worked poorly in the past because they were carried out in an authoritarian context that, through its political constraints, encouraged corruption and 'bad governance.' The logic was that when the political system became more responsive to ordinary citizens through democratic mechanisms, 'good governance' would emerge and the positive effects of neo-liberal reforms would begin to take hold. With this belief in mind, the problem is therefore not the policies themselves, but their implementation and, crucially, the implementers. While this might be partially true in theory – accountable governments make better policy choices than unaccountable ones – the reality has been very different on the ground and, interestingly, not only in North Africa. When one examines the effects of neo-liberal economic policies across the pond on the Northern bank of the Mediterranean, similar issues of increasing poverty, youth unemployment, widening income gap and collapsing trust

---

<sup>555</sup> See for example Koenraad Bogaert, 'Contextualising the Arab Revolts: the politics behind three decades of neo-liberalism in the Arab world,' *Middle East Critique* 22, 3 (2013): 213-234 and Gilbert Achcar, *The People Want* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

<sup>556</sup> Andrea Teti, 'The EU's first response to the Arab Spring: a critical discourse analysis of the partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity,' *Mediterranean Politics* 17, 3 (2012): 265-282.

in institutional politics are present despite the fact that countries such as Greece, Italy or Spain are liberal-democracies. In short, building democratic systems at time when such systems are no longer as responsive as they once were has proven detrimental to the construction of democracy in North Africa, leading, according to Benstead's work, many citizens to think that democracy is not suited to their country, no matter how desirable in theory that might be.<sup>557</sup> There is mounting evidence that external economic constraints are in part to blame for this 'gutting out' of democratic representativeness in established democracies and therefore how could this not affect countries where democracy is already finding it difficult to take hold? Established trade patterns, free trade agreements and financial dependency cannot be easily questioned or overturned by North African countries without painful consequences and this has had a powerfully constraining effect on the menu of policy choices available to local actors.

In addition to the role of international actors incapable or unwilling to understand the predicament of North Africa countries and therefore design policies intended to strengthen the need for a radical economic change of direction, a number of local actors made political choices destined to perpetuate long-standing social and economic relations against which many ordinary citizens had revolted. The Islamist parties in power in Tunisia, Egypt – briefly – and Morocco – subordinated to monarchical power – did not challenge in any meaningful way the economic structure in place for both pragmatic and ideological reasons. At the ideological level, despite their emphasis on the need to create a just and more equitable society with an emphasis on public services and redistribution of the ill-gotten wealth of ruling elites, this objective was never meant to be achieved through the adoption of economic policies questioning the primacy of the free market or the necessity of integration into the global economy.<sup>558</sup> Sean McMahon goes as far as arguing that 'the *Ikhwan* is neoliberal; they, like Republicans and Tories, are *market* fundamentalists. The *Ikhwan* is being marginalised because it was not reforming the state along neoliberal lines fast enough.'<sup>559</sup> Thus, rather than through radical economic change, the just society could be achieved through the greater use of charity, which sounds very much like the notion of compassionate conservatism popular in the United States. At the pragmatic level, Islamist leaders decided that there was no political gain in challenging entrenched economic interests because these could disrupt their attempt at occupying state institutions after decades of political marginalisation. Acutely aware of external constraints, they refrained from addressing the popular demands coming from the street. It would be however mistaken to point the finger solely at Islamist parties. As Buehler's contribution makes clear, other actors too preferred not to 'rock the boat' unduly in order to gain some material benefits from these moments of political instability. The Moroccan public sector trade unions used the protests in the country to secure increased advantages for

---

<sup>557</sup> Lindsay Benstead, 'Why do some Arab citizens see democracy as unsuitable to their country?', *Democratization* (2014). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2014.940041> (accessed 26/9/2014).

<sup>558</sup> See for instance Nader Habibi, 'The economic agendas and the expected economic policies of Islamists in Tunisia and Egypt,' *Middle East Brief*, Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Brandeis University, no. 67, October 2012, 1-8 and Sean McMahon, 'Egypt's impoverishing choice,' June 2012. <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article31658.htm> (accessed 25/9/2014).

<sup>559</sup> Sean McMahon, 'Class warfare in Egypt', *Counterpunch*, 9/7/2013. <http://www.counterpunch.org/2013/07/09/class-warfare-in-egypt/> (accessed 25/9/2014).

workers when negotiating with the political elite rather than use their considerable weight to swell the ranks of protestors and demand more fundamental political, even revolutionary, changes. In this respect, Tunisia was initially different from Morocco because the trade union UGTT – or at least its local branches rather than the national leadership - mobilised rather quickly to contribute to the overthrow of the Ben Ali regime. However, as the ‘transition’ progressed in the country, the UGTT also toned down considerably its revolutionary rhetoric preferring to play the mediator between political parties and society in order to remain relevant and obtain economic advantages. Both actors adopted a very rational behaviour that allowed them not only to play a central role in political life, but were also able to secure significant material benefits for their members, at least in the short-term. This is quite positive *per se* and it is in line with the mandate of any union, but their actions did not resonate with a wider public that was initially keener on more radical positions, particularly in terms of the institutional changes necessary to implement different economic policies. For instance in Morocco, the stance of the public sector unions deepened an already weakening solidarity among workers, as the ones in the private sector continue to suffer from poor social protections, under-employment and difficult working conditions. Beyond the role of unions, a more profound problem is that the actors of the left more generally have been unable to take advantage of the political and economic crisis. This dimension does not emerge as strongly from the special issue, but it is an important part of the story because it ‘connects’ the Arab world to other realities where the left also, despite the ‘opportunity’ that the 2008 crisis provide, was unable to profit either electorally and/or ideologically from it. While much emphasis in the literature on Arab politics is placed on progressive social movements, alter-globalisation activists, workers’ protests and emerging spaces of leftist contestation, this has not translated into widespread electoral or mass popular support for them. It is true that meaningful change does not have to come through parliaments or political parties and that an increasing number of people across different political systems are organising through non-traditional means, but support for what can be broadly construed as leftist politics when it comes to economics has not materialised. In part this has to do with the dominant discourse – hegemonic Gramsci would say – that there is no alternative to the economic system in place and that we therefore have all to dance to the same tune even if we do not like it. This is not necessarily true in reality, as many policy alternatives to the current ones have been provided for decades, but the generalised perception is that alternatives do not exist. In part it has also to do with traditional and long-standing divisions that have affected leftist politics both in the Arab world and elsewhere. Long-standing political struggles between different leftist personalities, accusations of betrayal and ideological disputes on finer points of leftist dogmas have left local actors unable and unwilling to construct ideologically and to provide politically an alternative economic plan that could meet at least in part the expectations of the protesting masses.<sup>560</sup>

---

<sup>560</sup> Michele Penner Angrist, ‘Parties, Parliament and Political Dissent in Tunisia,’ *Journal of North African Studies* 4, 1 (1999): 89–104. For an example of the problems of the Arab left outside of North Africa, see Manal Jamal, ‘Beyond Fateh Corruption and Mass Discontent: Hamas, the Palestinian Left and the 2006 Legislative Elections,’ *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 40, 3 (2013): 273–294.

This larger failure to address socio-economic needs eventually furthered political instability, which, in turn, affected the economy negatively, as the collapsing revenues from the tourist industry in Tunisia for instance painfully highlight. More generally, this has had a number of political repercussions. First, it has focused the attention of local political actors away from economic policy-making – by consensus it was out of their hands – and towards identity-based issues. While Islamist parties, at least in Morocco and Tunisia, have proven to be rather pragmatic when dealing with sensitive issues such as the introduction of *sharia* law, revisiting personal status legislation or allowing for freedom of conscience, their success has ‘frightened’ what can be termed the liberal sector of society.<sup>561</sup> It is true that both countries have had coalition governments between Islamists and ‘liberals’, but the alliance has been uneasy, fraught with tension, and ultimately, secular parties have lost the confidence of many citizens and militants who have left the party flocking to political movements that are more confrontational towards Islamists or becoming active in civil society activism.<sup>562</sup> The confrontation has been much more intense in Egypt, although, ultimately, the Salafi party al-Nour backed the military coup of 2013 just like the ‘liberals’ because it rid government of the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>563</sup> Thus, on a range of issues such as women’s rights, broader individual rights or protection of minorities, tensions have characterised the relationships between the two camps, undermining the temporary alliance they had made early before and/or during the ‘Spring’ and affecting the mutual trust necessary to build solid institutions. The focus on identity-based issues is not necessarily misplaced and it has had the merit of highlighting the different policy positions of both the political and social actors that had emerged out in the open from authoritarian rule. In a number of instances and for many ordinary citizens these issues constitute a priority and they should be addressed. However, such an emphasis might be detrimental to the necessary focus that other possibly more important issues should attract. A second repercussion has to do with political instability itself. Moments of transition or regime change are by definition volatile and actors involved in the process are uncertain about both tactics and strategy. In such a volatile situation, the inability to address the majority of popular key socio-economic demands together with the sense of a worsening security situation for all citizens because of the emergence of radical social and political actors that had previously not invested so forcefully the public scene has led to understandable demands for a ‘return’ to the past.

In short, the contributions to this special issue correctly refrain from analysing change as inevitably directed towards democracy not occurred. What emerges is not only that the conditions that are necessary for a genuine transition to some form of accountable and

---

<sup>561</sup> Moataz El Figeiry, ‘Tyranny of the majority? Islamists’ ambivalence towards human rights,’ FRIDE Working Paper, 113, October 2012, 1-19.

<sup>562</sup> For the case of Tunisian parties see for example, Andrea Brody-Barre, ‘The impact of political parties and coalition building on Tunisia’s democratic future,’ *Journal of North African Studies* 18, 2 (2013): 211-230.

<sup>563</sup> Abdelwahab El-Affendi, ‘Arab Spring, Islamist Ice Age: Islamism, Democracy, and the Dictatorship of the “Liberalism of Fear” in the Era of Revolutions,’ *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 30, 4 (2013): 1-18.

broadly representative government are not yet – or no longer – present, but that alternative paths of change exist, leading them simply to a transition to somewhere.<sup>564</sup>

### **No authoritarian continuity**

The absence of democratic change does not necessarily equate with the persistence of authoritarian rule as we knew it. Writing in 2004, Schlumberger and Albrecht noted that democratisation in the Arab world was not the name of the game and that authoritarian systems had simply regenerated themselves through a process of re-legitimisation.<sup>565</sup> They argued that institutions might have changed, but the fundamentally authoritarian nature of the system had not. Later on Steven Heydemann convincingly claimed that Arab states had simply been able to upgrade their authoritarianism by employing hollowed out economic and political liberal reforms, which gave the impression that regimes were changing – democratising – while in fact they were solidifying the grip on power of the ruling elites through informal processes of social and political control.<sup>566</sup> In some of the contributions to this special issue there is a hint that what occurred during the late 1990s and 2000s across the region might be repeated today with the mass protests and brief democratic interludes in many Arab countries simply seen as another stage in the renewal of authoritarian practices. This seems particularly the case for Egypt under al-Sisi, but also of Morocco and Algeria, a case not dealt with in this special issue. For countries where the claim that authoritarianism has reasserted itself cannot hold, as in Libya and Tunisia, political instability and seemingly endless conflicts, violent at times, for the control of political power among post-uprising actors have generated such disillusionment with the current situation that the desire for the ‘strong man’ to solve all problems has resurfaced. In short, not much seems to have changed after the uprisings and the uprisings have not been the earth-shattering or world-transforming events that they were initially deemed to be. First, as early as October 2011 Heydemann and Leenders emphasised what they called authoritarian learning, namely that authoritarian regimes were able to learn from the mistakes of dictators that had fallen in order to shore up their rule through appropriate policy responses.<sup>567</sup> The case of Morocco as highlighted in this special issue comes to mind. Second, the uprisings are increasingly perceived as having destabilised the region. In this respect there is also a powerful longing

---

<sup>564</sup> Morten Vlabjörn, ‘Upgrading Post-democratization Studies: Examining a Re-politicized Arab World in a Transition to Somewhere,’ *Middle East Critique* 21, 1 (2012): 25-35.

<sup>565</sup> Oliver Schlumberger and Holger Albrecht, ‘Waiting for Godot: Regime Change without Democratization in the Middle East,’ *International Political Science Review* 35, 4 (2004): 371-392.

<sup>566</sup> Steven Heydemann, ‘Upgrading authoritarianism in the Arab world’, Analysis Paper, Brookings Institution, 2007. <http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2007/10arabworld.aspx> (accessed 26/9/2014).

<sup>567</sup> Steven Heydemann and Reinoud Leenders, ‘Authoritarian learning and authoritarian resilience: regime responses to the Arab Awakening,’ *Globalizations* 8, 5 (2011): 647-653.



within the international community for the 'good old days' when one needed not to worry too much about Muslim Brothers, Salafists, alter-globalisation activists, sectarian militias, recalcitrant labour leaders or inflaming preachers because the authoritarian regimes were seemingly able to keep a lid on society and avoid the current chaos. The problem is however that the authoritarian continuity the contributors to the special issue address is often superficial and has to deal with fundamental changes in state-society relations that make the 'break' of the uprisings revolutionary. In addition the stability of old, if stability indeed it was, is unlikely to return. Thus, the contributions to the special issue shed some light directly and indirectly on instances of profound change that will have an impact on the type of governance that will characterise North African societies. The tearing down of the wall of fear surrounding citizens *vis-à-vis* their regimes is potentially the most significant consequence of the uprisings and this renders authoritarian governance much more difficult. Previous attempts at authoritarian upgrading in North Africa were not really driven from below or at least only partly so. There were of course bread riots, demonstrations and mobilisations, spaces of open political contestation and a sense that regimes were not quite as popular as they claimed to be, but most challenges were dealt with reasonably easily and quickly in part thanks to the repressive apparatus and in part through alliances with emerging social groups that could prop up the ruling elites in exchange for material benefits. The veneer of liberalism of the late 1990s and 2000s was applied therefore mainly to satisfy international patrons rather than to respond to widespread and sustained pressures from below. The Arab uprisings were a challenge of an entirely different scale and actually led to the departure of a four dictators who had been in power for decades and the breaking out of civil conflict in Syria, whose regimes were considered immune to any significant popular mobilisation. Irrespective of the survival of a number of regimes, particularly monarchies, the reality of the uprisings is that they ensured that nowhere authoritarian rule would remain unchanged. With the wall of fear no longer as high or insurmountable, it has become vastly more complex to manage society because there is today the realisation on the part of all social and political actors that a significant degree of pluralism characterise North African polities and that the will of the people can no longer be embodied in one person or one party or one idea.<sup>568</sup> Such pluralism has to be accommodated.

First, political parties of all ideological persuasions have become more important actors than they previously were. Despite their structural weaknesses, the reasonably little trust they generate within the wider public, or their often petty differences, they are no longer as insignificant as they used to be.<sup>569</sup> Their presence and activism testifies to the variety of ideologies and social groups which they attempt to mobilise. The leaders in power have to take this factor into account, particularly when there have been free and fair elections, at least once, after immediately following the uprisings. Future elections might have to compare with previous 'democratic' ones fundamentally altering the nature of authoritarianism. Second,

---

<sup>568</sup> This point had been made in Larbi Sadiki, 'The search for citizenship in Bin Ali's Tunisia: democracy versus unity,' *Political Studies* 50, 3 (2002): 497-513.

<sup>569</sup> On the past insignificance of parties see Michael Willis, 'Political parties in the Maghrib: the illusion of significance?,' *Journal of North African Studies* 7, 2 (2002): 1-22. On their increasing relevance see Lise Storm, *Party politics and the prospects of democracy in North Africa* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2013).

workers have found a new voice and new avenues of mobilisation that cannot be easily shut down.<sup>570</sup> Through better domestic and international connections workers' movements and unions, even when they have come to compromise with authoritarian leaders as Buehler argues in his article, have acquired greater strength and while they have not achieved what they set out to do during the uprisings they remain actors to be contended with, again demonstrating the difficulty to continue ignoring them. Finally, civil society activism more broadly has significantly increased in the years after the uprisings and while de-politicisation and disenchantment might have more recently prevailed in the face of mounting difficulties and political disappointments, mobilisation around all sorts of different issues is a much higher than it used to be.

## Conclusion

Where does this leave the debate about the most appropriate theoretical frameworks through which one can study the region as a whole and North Africa more specifically? As mentioned earlier, Morten Valbjørn suggested that following the uprisings countries were in transition to somewhere and not necessarily to democracy. The contributions to the special issue suggest precisely this. They present evidence of the absence of genuine democratic change and implicitly question the assumptions that political developments in the countries under examination can and should be read through the framework of democratisation, whereby Tunisia is on its way to become a liberal-democracy, Morocco is struggling to some way at the mid-point along the path and Egypt has known a set-back that brought it back to the starting line. Yet, there is also evidence that there is not necessarily authoritarian continuity either, challenging the paradigm on the persistence of authoritarianism, which would tend to downplay the significance of the uprisings as mere blips that simply provided the opportunity to redistribute power among different sectors of the authoritarian ruling elites. The argument that Ray Hinnebusch makes in his contribution might be more compelling because it is also linked to wider developments across the globe. Hinnebusch argues that the countries under examination, although through different historical trajectories and to different degrees, are hybrid regimes mixing democratic and authoritarian traits where the fundamentals of policy-making, and in particular economic policy, are beyond the reach of influence of ordinary citizens. Such concept of hybrid regimes harks back, when it comes to the Arab world, to the notion of liberalised autocracies that Brumberg had coined in the early 2000s.<sup>571</sup> However, and differently from Brumberg, the concept Hinnebusch employs can be extended to describe the reality of many countries around the globe, including ones that would define themselves as liberal democracies, and it is a reality that should be analysed in its own right and not as if it were simply a temporary stop on the path to a pre-defined somewhere. There is possibly some merit therefore in the idea of the convergence of governance that makes North Africa not so exceptional after all, as political and bureaucratic elites increasingly share beliefs about

---

<sup>570</sup> Joel Beinin, 'The rise of Egypt's workers,' *Carnegie Papers*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 2012, 1-23.

<sup>571</sup> Daniel Brumberg, 'The trap of liberalised autocracy,' *Journal of Democracy* 13, 4 (2002): 56-68.

how societies and economies should be run.<sup>572</sup> The similarities of public policy-making across radically different regimes<sup>573</sup> and the widespread technocratization of policy choices that marginalise even the elected officials of established democracies<sup>574</sup> together with the securatisation of all sorts of different issues and the convergent group-think of globalised political, bureaucratic and business elites are only some of the many shared characteristics of all regimes. Quite worryingly all this seems to lead to a point where the differences between authoritarianism and democracy are increasingly blurred and it should encourage therefore scholars to engage more critically with the paradigms developed thus far.

---

<sup>572</sup> At a more theoretical level see Francesco Cavatorta, 'The convergence of governance. Upgrading authoritarianism in the Arab world and downgrading democracy elsewhere?,' *Middle East Critique* 19, 3 (2010): 217–232. Empirical research conducted on the EU has already demonstrated that shared beliefs are more important than institutions when it comes to design policies. See for instance Claudio Radaelli and Karl O'Connor, 'How bureaucratic élites imagine Europe: towards convergence of governance beliefs?,' *Journal of European Public Policy* 16, 7 (2009): 971–989.

<sup>573</sup> Aude Signoles, 'Réforme de l'Etat et transformation de l'action publique' in Elizabeth Picard, ed., *La Politique dans le monde Arabe* (Paris: Armand Collin, 2006), 239–261. I am grateful to Nouredine Mihoubi for pointing me in this direction.

<sup>574</sup> For an example of this at the international level see Peter Seeberg, 'Union for the Mediterranean – pragmatic multilateralism and the depoliticisation of European-Middle Eastern relations,' *Middle East Critique* 19, 3 (2010): 287–302. Already in 2004 the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development had warned against the technocratic take-over of policy-making, 'Technocratic policy-making and democratic accountability', Research Brief, UNRISD, August 2004. [http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpAuxPages\)/AE49CC52BEFC658EC1256EFA002D44FB/\\$file/RPB3e.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpAuxPages)/AE49CC52BEFC658EC1256EFA002D44FB/$file/RPB3e.pdf) (accessed 25/9/2014).